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A two-part exploratory study into social media use amongst adolescent girls

1. What are the reported experiences and perceptions of using social media amongst adolescent girls? 2. What do Educational Psychologists understand about social media use amongst adolescent girls and what can they do to support young people?

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**A two-part exploratory study into social media use amongst
adolescent girls:**

- 1. What are the reported experiences and perceptions of using
social media amongst adolescent girls?**

- 2. What do Educational Psychologists understand about social
media use amongst adolescent girls and what can they do to
support young people?**

Caroline Butler

A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the
requirements for award of the degree of Doctor of Educational Psychology in the
Faculty of Policy Studies.

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Abstract

The use of social media (SM) websites and apps such as Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat have become a fundamental part of adolescence as young people have gained increased access to smart phones. Adolescent girls use SM more than their male peers (The Children's Society, 2018) and are more likely than boys to experience something that upsets them on SM (Lilley, Ball, & Vernon, 2014). Previous literature has tended to focus upon young adults' usage of SM and has often adopted a quantitative approach. Our current understanding about the experiences of adolescent girls using SM and the impact of these platforms on mental wellbeing is limited. This is unsurprising given the speed of technological change.

Educational Psychologists (EPs) apply psychological theory and models when working with young people, school staff and families to reduce barriers to learning and promote inclusion. There are currently no studies into the perception or experiences of EPs on the topic of SM use amongst adolescent girls.

This qualitative study used interviews to explore the reported experiences and perceptions of eight adolescent girls who use SM every day. A focus group was carried out with six EPs to elicit their voice on SM use amongst adolescent girls. A constructivist-interpretive approach was adopted, and thematic analysis was used to analyse the transcripts.

The findings suggest that the girls partake in a balancing act when using SM to enjoy the advantages (being entertained, keeping up with friends, sharing experiences) and the disadvantages (partaking in a culture of comparison, cyber-bullying, falling out with friends and becoming reliant on SM to maintain friendships). The EPs suggested a wider, more holistic approach is needed to encourage a positive use of SM and to support young people's mental wellbeing.

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And finally, thank you Gareth for your selfless support and endless patience.

Author's declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

Signed_____

Date_____

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List of abbreviations

EHCP	Education, health and care plan
EP	Educational Psychologist
SENCo	Special educational needs coordinator
SM	Social media
TA	Thematic Analysis
Trainee EP	Trainee educational psychologist
UK	United Kingdom

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Evolution of technology and “Generation Z”

Technology has evolved quickly over the last ten years, making it more sophisticated and more available for a younger audience. Since 2010, there has been a rise in young people, aged 12-15, owning smart phones (Ofcom, 2017). The mobile element of smart phones and widespread access to the Internet has allowed young people to connect to others whilst “on-the-go” (Quinn & Oldmeadow, 2013, p.238). SM websites and apps have also evolved since MySpace was first introduced and used widely by adolescents in 2004, followed by Facebook in 2006 (boyd & Ellison, 2008). Users of SM can now create and share content (such as opinions, news and photographs) on a much larger scale compared to a time before SM (Romero, Galuba, Asur, & Huberman, 2011). Young people have therefore become publishers as well as consumers of content (Awan & Gauntlett, 2013). The smart phone has also facilitated text based communication between young people (Lenhart, 2015). Owning a smart phone and accessing SM has become synonymous amongst adolescents (The Children's Society, 2018).

The generation born between 1993 and 2005 have been coined “Generation Z” (Turner, 2015, p.103). They have grown up with access to the Internet, SM and smart phones which sets them apart from older generations (Turner, 2015).

1.2 Significance of topic

In their annual survey into the media use and attitudes towards media amongst children aged 3-15 and their parents, Ofcom, (2017, p.2) have highlighted the following figures amongst 12-15 year olds; 83 % have their own smartphone and 74% have a SM profile.

Although Ofcom (2017) reported no gender difference in having a SM profile, research suggests adolescent girls use SM more than their male peers (Cingel, Lauricella, Wartella, & Conway, 2014; Wang & Edwards, 2016; The Children's Society, 2018) and are more likely than boys to experience something that upsets them on SM (Lilley et al., 2014). In a survey of 1,089 young people (75% were

female) aged 11-25, over a third of the 16-17-year olds reported using SM for more than four hours each day (The Children's Society, 2018).

The proliferation of SM use amongst adolescents, especially girls, highlights the significant role it can play within the lives of young people.

1.2.1 Mental wellbeing definition and the potential impact of SM on the mental wellbeing of young people

For the purpose of this thesis, the term mental wellbeing has been adopted in order to cover the wide spectrum of mental health. For clarification, I have provided the following definition of mental wellbeing as outlined by Adi, Killoran, Janmohamed and Stewart-Brown, (2007, p.21).

Mental wellbeing encompasses:

- emotional wellbeing (including happiness and confidence, and the opposite of depression and anxiety).
- psychological wellbeing (including resilience, mastery, confidence, autonomy, attentiveness/involvement and the capacity to problem solve).
- social wellbeing (good relationships with others, emotional intelligence, the capacity to manage conflict and the opposite of conduct disorder, delinquency, interpersonal violence and bullying).

The term mental health will be adopted when it has been used in the literature and by the sample.

I will now discuss how SM may have a positive or negative impact on the mental wellbeing of its users.

SM has become a space in which we form and build relationships, shape self-identity, express ourselves, and learn about the world around us; it is intrinsically linked to mental health (Cramer & Inkster, 2017, p.5).

SM can be a space for young people to relax, stay in touch with people who do not live nearby, and can enable users to express solidarity (Waldie, Foylan, Wootton,

Holland, & De lonno, 2017). It can also provide friendship for young people with communication difficulties and disabilities and it can provide support for young people suffering from mental health difficulties or who are navigating their gender and identity (The Children's Society, 2018).

However, SM use may have some negative effects upon the mental wellbeing of young people. Research suggests the risks associated with SM include spending excessive amounts of time online, oversharing of information, being a victim of cyber bullying, the effect of SM on body image concerns and access to harmful information (Frith, 2017). Internet and SM usage has become more private as young people can access websites and apps on their smart phones, away from adult supervision (The Children's Society, 2018), potentially making them more vulnerable to experiencing the risks of SM alone. Girls appear more vulnerable to the risks compared to boys. For example, 46% of girls aged 11-25 have stated that SM use has had a negative effect on their attitude towards themselves and they appear more likely than boys to report an experience of and be a victim of cyber bullying (The Children's Society, 2018).

1.3 Professional and personal interest in the topic

This may not seem ordinary to you now, but after a time it will. It will become ordinary. (Atwood, 1986, p.43).

This quote from *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood has resonated with me over the past four years as I have experienced a shift in how we communicate, what we share with others and how we spend our free time. It has become *ordinary* for people, especially young people, to spend a lot of time on their smart phones, often accessing SM apps.

A small-scale research project into *normal adolescent worry* when I was an assistant EP in 2015, indicated that SM use was embedded into adolescents' lives. The results of this research suggested that adolescents did not often distinguish between communicating over SM and communicating via other means. I found this an

interesting experience and it sparked my curiosity to explore further how and why adolescents are using SM and what possible impact these platforms may be having on the mental wellbeing of young people.

From a personal perspective, I often feel uncomfortable observing how the smart phone has become an essential accessory; reflecting a possible need for constant connection, entertainment and instant gratification. It has also been a barrier for me when trying to form authentic, genuine human relationships.

I have reflected upon my own experiences with SM and how I have learnt to enjoy the advantages and manage the disadvantages. From these reflections, I began to wonder how the younger generation, especially adolescent girls, are enjoying the advantages and managing the disadvantages of using SM. I became curious to explore how, why and what SM websites and apps adolescent girls use and how the educational psychology profession can be applied to help us better understand and support our young people.

1.4 The study's origins and significance

After having observed the increase in SM use amongst both adults and young people, I carried out a preliminary literature search. This search reflected the findings from Allen, Ryan, Gray, McInerney, and Waters (2014) who highlighted how newspapers and magazines have published articles on SM use and the possible impact of SM use on the mental wellbeing of its users, but there remains a lack of empirical research on this topic. It appears to be challenging for empirical research to keep up with the fast-changing technology which includes smart phones and SM. Specifically, I noticed a gap in the literature which represented adolescent girls' own stories and voices via qualitative methods. In the United Kingdom (UK), it has become increasingly important to hear young peoples' voices on matters that impact upon their lives (Morrow & Richards, 1996). Livingstone & Brake (2010) argue that research into young peoples' uses of SM must keep up with their experiences. As a population who are using SM the most, it is important that the voices of adolescent girls are heard.

In addition, there does not yet appear to be any research into the EP voice in relation to their experience, knowledge and role working with adolescents using SM. The

psychologist brings a new perspective to human behaviour, asks specific questions and draws upon established tools and interventions (Cameron, 2006). Given how closely the EP profession works with young people and the psychological perspective they could bring to SM use amongst adolescents, it is important that their voice, too, is heard.

1.4.1 Aims of the research

The aims of this research are to provide a significant, original contribution to knowledge, in the form of a piece of qualitative research exploring the reported experiences of SM use amongst adolescent girls. The following research questions reflect these aims;

1. What are the reported experiences of SM use by adolescent girls?
2. What are the advantages of using SM as perceived by adolescent girls?
3. What are the disadvantages of using SM as perceived by adolescent girls?
4. How do adolescent girls manage the disadvantages of SM?

In addition, it is hoped that this research will elicit the EP voice on their reported experiences and perspectives of SM use amongst adolescent girls as well as demonstrate how the profession can help to support schools, families and young people to safely navigate SM. The following research questions therefore guided this study;

1. Why may adolescent girls behave as they do on SM?
2. What may be the potential impact of SM use on adolescent girls?
3. How can the EP profession support young people, families and school staff to safely navigate SM?

1.5 The research setting

The research took place in a rural, mainstream secondary school with eight adolescent girls aged 14-15 years old. The focus group took place in a large, rural local authority educational psychology service with six EPs.

1.6 Epistemological stance

An interpretive epistemology and constructionist ontology has been assumed in this research to reflect the belief that humans experience multiple realities and these realities are subjective and individual (Krauss, 2005). This assumption led to the adoption of a constructivist interpretive research paradigm which suggests there is not one exact, objective reality but each person's reality is created in different ways (Fox, 2003).

A qualitative methodology was chosen over a quantitative methodology to answer the exploratory research questions outlined in section 1.4.1. An inductive approach was adopted to enable the research to produce theory; theory did not guide the research (Bryman, 2008). Braun and Clarke, (2013) define qualitative research as being “exploratory, open-ended and organic, and produces in-depth, rich and detailed data from which to make claims” (p.21). The focus of this study was not to produce generalizable data but instead to produce rich, detailed descriptions of SM use by adolescent girls in order to elicit their voices and contextualise their use of SM. Similarly, the focus group with EPs was not to generalise their responses but to explore their experiences and psychological ideas related to SM use amongst adolescent girls in order to explore how psychology can be applied to understand and support positive SM use amongst young people.

1.7 Definitions of terminology

I will outline below a definition for SM which will be followed by a definition and description of the most popular SM websites and apps used by adolescents. Given the variability in language and the potential misunderstanding about the term “social media”, it is important that I convey my meaning of the term.

SM can be described as;

web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and

traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system (boyd & Ellison, 2008, p.211).

Snapchat



Snapchat has become the most used SM app amongst young people aged 12-15 (Ofcom, 2017). It enables users to send photos and text-based messages to other users. These messages disappear within one to ten seconds therefore it provides a space for more private communication to occur between users (Utz, Muscanell, & Khalid, 2015). However, users can “screen shot” a message or an image they have received which can then be saved onto their mobile phone, reducing the impermanency of messages.

Facebook



Facebook continues to be a popular SM platform amongst young people (Ofcom, 2017). This SM website and app enables users to make their own profile where they can post content such as links and photographs. Users can also take part in conversations with other users (Knight-McCord et al., 2016).

Instagram



Instagram is an app which enables its users to predominantly share photos and videos (Knight-McCord et al., 2016). It allows users to “follow” other users who can then connect through hashtags, the @ symbol when placed before a user’s name and direct messages (Hu, Manikonda, & Kambhampati, 2014) . Users can also manipulate and improve a photograph by putting a “filter” on it to make it look more desirable (Hu et al., 2014). Posting and sharing photographs and videos has become an increasingly key part of SM activity (Rainie, Brenner, & Purcell, 2012).

YouTube



Lange (2008) has defined YouTube as “a public video-sharing website where people can experience varying degrees of engagement with videos, ranging from casual viewing to sharing videos to maintain social relationships” (p.361). In a similar way to Facebook and Instagram, users of YouTube can set up their own profile which is known as a “channel page” and other users can comment on their videos (Lange, 2008).

1.8 Relevance of topic to Educational Psychology

SM use has been linked with feelings of anxiety and depression, poor sleep, body image, cyber bullying and fear of missing out (Cramer & Inkster, 2017). The research into SM use and its potential impact on the mental wellbeing of its users remains in its infancy. However, more general discussions around the mental health needs of young people have increased in recent years. For example, the Government's Green Paper titled *Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision* (Greening & Hunt, 2017) outlines ways in which young peoples' mental health can be supported in schools. This paper includes a section on how using the Internet and SM can impact upon young peoples' mental health therefore a greater understanding of the relationship between SM and mental wellbeing can help EPs to support young people, schools and families to use SM in a balanced and healthy way.

Furthermore, the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice (Department for Education, 2014) includes an area of need termed "social, emotional and mental health" (p. 85) and is encouraging education settings to support young peoples' mental wellbeing within their current environment. It could be argued that the EP profession is well placed to support settings in providing for the mental wellbeing of their young people as they can apply psychology at an individual, group and systemic/organisational level whilst carrying out the five core functions; research, training, consultation, intervention and assessment (Currie, 2002). Specifically, Roffey (2015) argues that the EP role can support young peoples' mental wellbeing in schools by eliciting the voice of children, instilling a sense of agency in young people when decisions are made about how best to support them, supporting the wellbeing of teachers and promoting the importance of wellbeing at a whole school level.

It may be helpful for young people, families and professionals to understand a psychological perspective on why adolescent girls use SM and the potential impact it may have on the mental wellbeing of its users. This increase in understanding may then help to mitigate the costs of SM use, keeping young people safe from potential harm.

1.9 Outline of the structure of the thesis

Chapter two is the literature review. This starts by covering the theoretical concepts for why SM use may have a positive or detrimental impact on the mental wellbeing of its users. The next section examines theories and models of adolescent development and considers specific challenges and priorities that female adolescents may experience. The final sections outline the role of SM on topics such as sleep, identity, friendships, cyber-bullying and body image.

Chapter three presents the methodology. It provides a critical examination of the chosen research paradigm (constructivist interpretive) and methodology (qualitative) and provides a rationale for these choices. This chapter also includes a thorough description of the research process and how the data analysis was carried out. Ethical considerations and validity and reliability within qualitative research will also be discussed.

Chapter four outlines the findings from both the interviews and the focus group. Quotes have been included throughout this chapter to support the different themes.

Chapter five is a discussion of the findings in relation to each of the research questions. Previous research in the area and relevant theoretical concepts will be discussed. Chapter five also outlines how this study has provided a unique contribution to knowledge. It provides the reader with reflections on the research process, strengths and limitations of this study and implications from the findings for school staff, parents, young people and EPs.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Structure of the Literature Review

The literature review will begin with a discussion of different theoretical perspectives on how SM use might impact on a young person's mental wellbeing. Research that has been carried out in the UK on adolescents' uses of SM will be included within the relevant theoretical sections to provide the reader with an empirical context for the theoretical perspectives. The relationship between mental wellbeing and learning will then be discussed.

Following this, a critical discussion will be provided on models of adolescent development and how female adolescents face unique challenges and have certain priorities during this developmental period. The theoretical and psychological underpinnings of adolescence will be highlighted to provide a relevant background to the following sections which outline the role of SM use on topics such as sleep, identity, friendships, cyber-bullying and body image.

This chapter will conclude with a summary of the research on SM use amongst adolescents and an outline of the current study.

2.1.2 Systematic literature search

In order to synthesize a large body of evidence on the topic of SM, it was important to be systematic during the literature search to include the most relevant papers and ensure my time was used effectively when reading through the literature (Ridley, 2012). Three systematic literature searches were carried out between July 2017 and February 2018. Research published after February 2018 is not included.

Whilst carrying out the literature search, careful consideration was taken to develop specific inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure the most relevant papers were included. As a result, 16 key papers were decided upon. The details of this search, including the inclusion and exclusion criteria, are outlined in Appendix A.

2.2 Areas covered and not covered in the literature review

The following sections have been included to provide the reader with an overview of the theoretical perspectives on SM use and its potential impact on the mental wellbeing of its users. It is beyond the scope of this literature review to include all

theoretical perspectives on SM use therefore only those that are deemed most relevant to this study have been included.

Theories on adolescent development have been included to provide the reader with an insight into the possible reasons why SM use may have more of a positive or negative effect on young peoples' mental wellbeing compared to adult users.

The remaining empirical papers which were found as a result of the systematic literature search are then outlined under specific headings.

2.3 Theoretical perspectives

The following section will provide the reader with an overview of the key theoretical ways in which SM use may contribute to or inhibit positive wellbeing. The empirical studies into adolescent experiences of SM in the UK which reflect a theoretical idea will be included below.

2.3.1 How could SM use have a positive effect on mental wellbeing?

Research into SM suggest that using these platforms can have a positive impact on mental wellbeing as their use has been associated with helping to form an identity, helping to maintain supportive relationships, promoting self-esteem and nurturing a sense of belonging (Collin, Rahilly, Richardson, & Third, 2011; Allen, Ryan, Gray, McInerney & Waters, 2014).

2.3.1.1 Self-disclosure and the stimulation hypothesis

Research suggests adolescents use the Internet to primarily chat with friends through instant messaging features on SM (Lilley et al., 2014). The stimulation hypothesis argues that online communication may be easier for adolescents compared to communicating face to face due to reduced feelings of inhibition and an increase in the ability to freely share personal information (McKenna & Bargh, 2000). This increase in self-disclosure can then lead to friendship intimacy, suggesting online communication can enhance the quality of offline friendships for young people (McKenna & Bargh, 2000). As a result of online communication having a positive impact on relationships, it may be positively related to adolescents' mental well-being (Valkenburg & Peter, 2007a).

Findings from a study with 138 young people aged between 14 and 15 across the UK supported the stimulation hypothesis as these young people appeared to use SM to freely express themselves without feeling embarrassed. They eluded to enjoying a sense of control over social situations which is not available in interactions when communicating face to face and used SM to maintain and develop relationships with friends and family (Awan & Gauntlett, 2013). However, acknowledgement was made to issues around misinterpretation and trust when communicating online. Data was collected in 2008 for Awan and Gauntlett's study therefore it remains unclear whether self-disclosure online and the stimulation hypothesis is having a positive effect on young people's mental wellbeing since more communication occurs online following the increase use of SM via smart phones.

2.3.1.2 Social capital

SM can be used as a tool to keep in touch with other people. Research suggests SM use can increase an individual's social capital (Nolan, Hendricks, Ferguson, & Towell, 2017). Social capital refers to the reciprocal and trustworthy connections made among individuals (Putman, 2001). These connections are thought to strengthen one's identity and recognition within a community and can serve as a protective factor for positive mental health and wellbeing (Lin, 1999).

Findings from a mixed methods study by Wang and Edwards (2016) suggested that young people (aged 11-16 from the UK) report using SM to welcome, build and explore within relationships that already exist and communication that occurred over SM helped to maintain existing relationships; findings which could suggest SM can increase their social capital. However, Wang and Edwards (2016) included tools such as email and texting during their study when they asked about young peoples' use of SM. It could be argued that email and texting are not a form of SM but instead are communicative tools as an individual cannot use email or text alone to construct a semi-public profile. More research is required into the unique ways in which SM use can establish and maintain relationships amongst adolescents and whether SM use can increase a user's social capital.

2.3.1.3 Martini effect and belonging

Quinn and Oldmeadow (2013) have referred to the ability to be connected to others via smart phones at any time day or night as “the martini effect-anytime, anyplace, anywhere” (p. 238). With the increase in 12-15 year old’s owning smart phones (Ofcom, 2017) and the synonymy between having a smart phone and accessing SM amongst adolescents (The Children’s Society, 2018), the martini effect could be applied to young people.

Being in constant contact with others could be an attractive feature of smart phones and SM as relationships and the need to belong to a peer group becomes an important part of adolescence (Quinn & Oldmeadow, 2013). Findings from Valkenburg and Peter (2007b) suggest that communicating online with friends can lead to feeling close to those friends. Furthermore, by using mobile phones to maintain contact with friends, an individual can experience feelings of being constantly connected (Walsh, White, & Young, 2009). The martini effect could therefore provide an increased feeling of being connected to others as a result of the increased accessibility to smart phones.

2.3.1.4 Hyper-natural monitoring hypothesis

Veissière and Stendel (2018) suggest that by using smart phones and SM, individuals are able to stay connected with others and are also able to observe and monitor others. This use of technology may meet our human needs “to be seen, heard from, thought about, monitored, judged, and appraised by others” (p.3) therefore having a positive effect on our mental wellbeing. Veissière and Stendel (2018) have drawn upon an evolutionary perspective of human behaviour and suggest that smart phone and SM use reflect a hyper-natural monitoring hypothesis.

2.3.2 How could SM use have a negative effect on mental wellbeing?

Research into the possible negative implications of frequent SM use suggests users can suffer from low self-esteem (Gonzales & Hancock, 2011) and mental health difficulties as a result of SM use reducing the quality of social interactions (Rajani, Berman, & Rozanski, 2011). Further risks associated with SM include spending excessive amounts of time online, oversharing of information, being a victim of cyber bullying, the effect of SM on body image concerns and access to harmful information (Frith, 2017).

2.3.2.1 Social Comparison theory

Festinger (1954) suggested that people evaluate themselves by comparing themselves with others in their peer group in order to achieve self-improvement. However, by engaging in social comparison behaviours, individuals may experience pressure to continue to better themselves (Meier & Gray, 2014). As a result of SM enabling young people to be both active (posting on SM) and passive (observing others' posts) online, social comparative behaviours may occur more often leading to feelings of not being good enough and missing out.

2.3.2.2 Disinhibition effect

Suler (2004) suggests that the anonymity, invisibility and lack of authority figures within cyberspace, alongside a range of personality variables, can influence how one may behave online. He suggests individuals can shift between different dimensions of their personality when in different situational contexts leading them to behave differently online to how they would behave offline. He has coined this the *Online Disinhibition Effect* (Suler, 2004).

Bullying behaviours that occur over SM can include circulating messages and spreading images (Crankster & Inkster, 2017). The anonymity appears to play a large role in the prevalence and seriousness of cyber bullying (Mishna, Saini, & Solomon, 2009).

2.3.2.3 Displacement hypothesis

The displacement hypothesis refers to how someone spends their time over other activities and how this may impact upon one's mental wellbeing. Spending time online has been found to reduce time spent offline maintaining established relationships (Kraut et al., 1998). Scholars have predicted that communicating online with strangers may reduce young peoples' mental well-being because less time is being spent on maintaining quality friendships offline (Valkenburg & Peter, 2007a). In addition, the displacement hypothesis suggests that by spending more time online, young people are not engaging with other activities which may be beneficial to their wellbeing such as relaxing or participating in sports (Wallsten, 2013).

The previous sections have outlined theoretical concepts which suggest how SM use may have a positive or negative effect on a young persons' wellbeing. The following

section will outline how and why SM use amongst adolescents is relevant to educational psychology.

2.4 SM, mental wellbeing and learning

Section 1.8 outlined the relevance of SM use to the EP profession, with a focus on supporting the mental wellbeing of young people. It may also be helpful to consider the relationship between SM use and mental wellbeing within the context of learning.

Emotions have been found to play a role (either impeding or enhancing) in children and young peoples' engagement with their learning, attitude towards their work, commitment to their studies and overall success at school (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). The Office of National Statistics reported that young people who have more effective social, emotional and behavioural skills and who experience increased levels of school wellbeing, are more engaged with their learning (Morrison Gutman & Vorhaus, 2012).

SM use has been linked with feelings of anxiety and depression (Cramer & Inkster, 2017). Research suggests that feelings of anxiety can make it difficult for an individual to stay focused on a task (Eysenck, Derakshan, Santos, & Calvo, 2007) therefore if young people are feeling anxious due to using SM, their ability to focus in the classroom may be reduced. Furthermore, if SM is having a negative impact upon a young person's mental wellbeing, they may become disengaged with their learning.

The following sections will outline models of adolescent development and will discuss the specific challenges that female adolescents may face during this developmental period.

2.5 Adolescence as a unique developmental period

It may be important to understand adolescence as a unique developmental period as the changes young people undergo during this developmental stage may influence why they use SM. In addition, the use of SM may have a more significant impact upon young peoples' mental wellbeing needs during this time of development.

Adolescence is considered to be a developmental period of considerable change. It has been defined as;

The developmental period during which *physical* (e.g. growth spurt, change in body mass, sexual maturation), *psychological* (e.g. affective intensity and liability, romantic and idealistic aspirations, sense of invulnerability, abstract thinking), and *social* (e.g. distancing from adults and children, primacy of peer relationships, romantic involvement) milestones are being reached (Ernst, Pine, & Hardin, 2006, p.2).

Neurological and psycho-social changes that are considered to occur during adolescence will be discussed in more detail below.

2.5.1 Changes in activity within neurological structures

Ernst et al. (2006) suggested that adolescents may experience changes in neurological activity within areas of the brain. These areas of the brain are associated with how one controls motivated behaviour and include the amygdala, the nucleus accumbens and the medial/ventral prefrontal cortex. Ernst et al (2006) propose that during adolescence;

Increased levels of reward/novelty seeking in the face of uncertainty or potential harm might be explained by a strong reward system (nucleus accumbens), a weak harm avoidant system (amygdala), and/or an inefficient supervisory system (medial/ventral prefrontal cortex) (Ernst et al., 2006, p.299).

It has been suggested that adolescents might sometimes partake in more risky behaviours and are more vulnerable to the onset of mental health difficulties (such as anxiety and depression) because of changes in activity within the neurological systems (Ernst et al., 2006).

Chein, Albert, O'Brien, Uckert, and Steinberg (2011) suggest changes occur within the reward-related areas of the adolescent brain when an adolescent is being observed by their peers. The ventral striatum and orbitofrontal cortex appeared to

increase in activity when adolescents were observed by their peers during a simulated driving task whilst in a functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) scanner. Chein et al (2011) suggest that this increase in reward-related brain activity can increase risky behaviour (such as in this study, not slowing the car when presented with a yellow traffic light) if it is likely to result in a potential reward (peer validation).

Furthermore, research into the adolescent brain suggests the subcortical affective areas of the brain appear to develop and mature at a faster rate compared to the frontal areas which mature more slowly (Somerville, Jones, & Casey, 2010). This difference in the maturation of brain areas could provide a reason as to why adolescents sometimes make decisions that are less rational and more emotional with limited consideration of the future implications of such decisions (Crone & Dahl, 2012).

Despite the possible changes in neurological structures within the adolescent brain, Pfeifer and Allen (2012) argue for a more nuanced approach to understanding why adolescents may partake in risky behaviours. Findings from research, which have used neuroimaging technology, appear to be inconsistent when looking into the neurological development of the adolescent brain (Vijayakumar, Op de Macks, Shirtcliff, & Pfeifer, 2018). Pfeifer and Allen (2012) suggest it may be more helpful to focus on the complex interactions between social, affective and cognitive processing in order to move away from a possible over reliance on the rates at which areas of the brain develop during adolescence and the impact of this on risk taking behaviours. There appears to be an increase in awareness that the social environment can have a strong impact upon the development of neural systems and the ways in which adolescents partake in decision making processes (Crone & Dahl, 2012).

2.5.2 Changes in psycho-social development

Adolescence is a developmental period when young people experience an increased need for autonomy whilst developing their own identity and navigating peer relationships (Shifflet-Chila, Harold, Fitton, & Ahmedani, 2016). This next section will discuss the psycho-social changes that occur during adolescence with a focus on identity and peer relationships.

2.5.2.1 Identity

To effectively regulate and govern their lives, individuals need to develop a stable and meaningful identity structure, which enables them to maintain a sense of self-continuity over time and space and which provides a frame of reference for making decisions, problem-solving, and interpreting experience and self-relevant information. (Berzonsky, Cieciuch, Duriez, & Soenens, 2011, p.295)

This quote highlights the important role that identity can play in one's life. The formation of identity is thought to be a developmental process that lasts a lifetime, however it appears to be more urgent during adolescence (Crocetti, 2017).

Adolescents tend to explore their identity in order to learn about themselves and discover how they fit into their social environment (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). The question 'who am I?' that is often proposed during identity formation is considered to play an important role in mental wellbeing and self-development (Arnold, 2017).

Erikson (1968) suggested that the psychological development of a human occurs in stages; adolescence occurs between the ages of 12 and 18 years. Throughout these stages, one must experience and successfully negotiate a psychosocial crisis in order to develop a positive sense of identity and acquire the relevant strengths to be able to resolve later crises. For example, an adolescent must navigate the crisis of *Ego identity vs Role confusion*. Figure one below outlines Erikson's stages of crisis which one may experience during development:

Stage	Psychosocial Crisis	Basic Virtue	Age
1	Trust vs. mistrust	Hope	Infancy (0 to 1 ½)
2	Autonomy vs. shame	Will	Early Childhood (1 ½ to 3)
3	Initiative vs. guilt	Purpose	Play Age (3 to 5)
4	Industry vs. inferiority	Competency	School Age (5 to 12)
5	Ego identity vs. Role Confusion	Fidelity	Adolescence (12 to 18)
6	Intimacy vs. isolation	Love	Young Adult (18 to 40)
7	Generativity vs. stagnation	Care	Adult hood(40 to 65)
8	Ego integrity vs. despair	Wisdom	Maturity (65+)

Figure 1: Erikson's stages of identity

Erikson suggested that for boys, their identity is accomplished by the end of the adolescent period (18 years old) whereas for girls their identity is complete once they have married and have had children who fill their internal space. This idea reflects the traditional roles of girls and women during that sociohistorical period (Berzoff, 1989). Erikson suggests the path of development is similar for boys and girls however as Unger (1988) explains, it may not be helpful to “add women and stir” (p.29) to a theory which is based primarily on male development.

Erikson's theory offers a familiar framework which helps to explain the importance of identity for an individual young person throughout the adolescent period and acknowledges the impact that the social environment can have on adolescent development alongside the physiological changes that happen during this time.

More recent research into the process of forming an identity during adolescence, suggests a dynamic approach may be helpful in understanding this often-complex developmental task.

Crocetti's (2017) three-factor identity model suggests individuals establish, reflect upon and revisit their identity across time. The three factors include *commitment*, *in-depth exploration* and *reconsideration of commitment*. *Commitment* is related to the choices an individual has made during a developmental stage, *in-depth exploration* reflects the degree to which an individual has thought about their commitments and *reconsideration of commitment* refers to the comparison between current commitments (or choices) with other commitments (Crocetti, 2017). It is suggested that these three factors interact during two cycles in which an adolescent forms and

maintains their identity. Cycle one: *commitment* and *reconsideration of commitment* interact where by an adolescent compares their current commitments with more attractive alternatives and begins to rethink their commitments when they are deemed no longer suitable (Crocetti, 2017). Cycle two: *commitment* and *in-depth exploration* interact to maintain one's identity. This enables an adolescent to “validate their current commitments, reflect on their meaning, invest in maintaining them, and make sure they fit their overall talents and potentials” (Crocetti, 2017, p.146). If *in-depth exploration* ignites feelings of unease (as adolescents doubt their existing commitments) they may revisit the cycle. Figure two below outlines the identity formation cycle as suggested by Crocetti (2017).

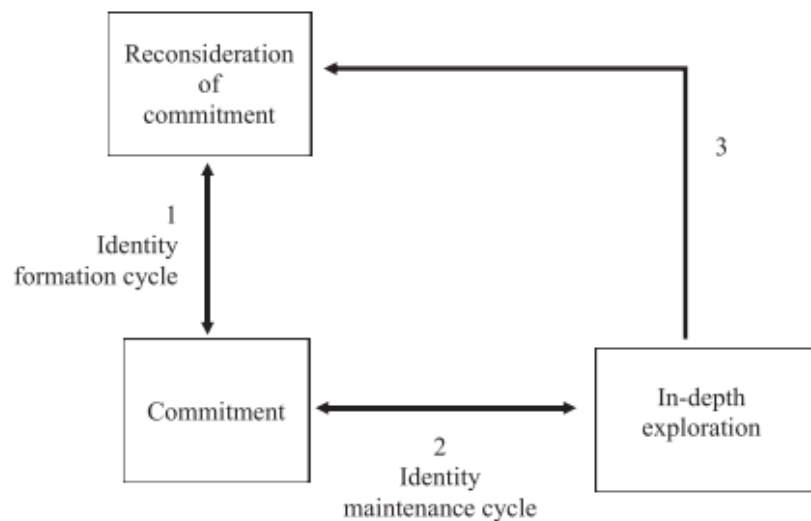


Figure 2: The three-factor model: Schematization of the dual cycle (identity formation and identity maintenance cycles) Crocetti, (2017).

2.5.2.2 Role of peers

The role of peers becomes more salient during adolescence as young people increase in their autonomy away from the family unit and often spend more time with their friends. Peers can therefore play a part in the identity formation of adolescents (Doeselaar, Meeus, Koot, and Branje, 2016).

When making friends and finding the appropriate peer group, research suggests adolescents may initially determine the norms of a valued peer group and then establish how to behave in such a way that would be approved by this peer group (Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011). The approval of a peer group can influence behaviour (including risky behaviour): the more favourable the behaviour from the peer group, the more willing that adolescent can be to engage in that behaviour (Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011).

As well as being a part of a peer group, adolescents often have 'best friends' which can reflect a more intimate friendship. Research suggests adolescents can partake in close friendships which involve 'balanced relatedness' as young people can become more accepting of their friend's differing ideas and opinions (Doeselaar et al., 2016, p.29). This element of intimate friendships during adolescence reflects the acceptance that the other person is an autonomous individual who has his or her own thoughts and wishes (Doeselaar et al., 2016).

I will now consider research which reflects the challenges that female adolescents may face during this developmental period.

2.5.3 Female adolescence

Relationships during adolescence amongst girls appear to play an important part in their self-esteem and identity. During this developmental period, females may be vulnerable to mental wellbeing difficulties such as anxiety and depression. They may also feel concerned about their body image. The importance of relationships and the vulnerability to experiencing mental wellbeing difficulties for girls during adolescence will be explored in more detail below.

2.5.3.1 Importance of relationships

Relationships appear to be central to the development of female adolescents (Tolman, Impett, Tracy, & Michael, 2006). Same-sex friendships amongst adolescent girls often involve high levels of intimacy, caring behaviours and self-disclosure but also feelings of jealousy and sharing of worries (Perry & Pauletti, 2011).

Surrey (1991) has proposed a fluid, dynamic and interconnected model of development in which a woman develops her sense of self from interacting with others and experiencing relationships. The role of conflict is perceived as part of a strong and enduring engagement with significant others where essential skills in relationship maintenance are learnt in preparation for adult life. This is in contrast to the role of conflict leading to separation and disconnection with significant others as suggested by Erikson (1968).

Surrey (1991) highlighted the importance of an adolescent girl's relationship with her parents. It has been thought that a girl will develop a positive sense of self-esteem if she has experienced an emotional connection with her parents. In particular, the continuous and changing mother-daughter relationship can play an essential role in a girl's self-development during adolescence. This relationship can often be characterised by mutual feelings of empathy, compassion, acceptance and forgiveness. Having experienced authentic emotional connections with her family, the adolescent girl is able to continue to develop and strengthen her identity. This is in contrast to the expectation that she completes and leaves the relational stage of development as suggested by Erikson (1968) but instead continues to add to her relational experiences to build upon her identity and sense of self. Surrey's (1991) model could be seen as being overly deterministic as the relationship between an adolescent girl and her parents is unlikely to be the only contributing factor to her developing positive self-esteem. However, this model does highlight the important role that family relationships can play during adolescence when girls are forming their own identity.

The relationships between an adolescent girl and her peers can also play an important part in identity formation. Berzoff (1989) suggested that friendships which are maintained during adolescence play four key roles in the identity of girls. Firstly, friends can act as role models who educate and support each other to feel safe to

experience new opportunities. Secondly, they can offer a mirror which provides feedback to develop one's identity. Thirdly, they can provide a journal type relationship where adolescent girls confide in their girlfriends and make sense of who they are becoming through talking with each other. And finally, their friendships can offer a safe space in which they navigate the increase in independence away from the family unit (Berzoff, 1989).

2.5.3.2 Mental wellbeing needs during female adolescence

Research suggests that during adolescence, girls are more affected by feelings of low self-esteem compared to boys (Kling, Hyde, Showers, & Buswell, 1999). Overall, girls appear to suffer from a poorer body image (Perry & Pauletti, 2011) and some girls appear to be vulnerable to femininity ideologies. For example, feelings of low self-esteem and depressed mood have been associated with girls that have internalized conventional body image ideologies (Tolman et al., 2006). As the influence of the media and peers strengthens during adolescence, girls appear to be vulnerable to feeling concerned about their body image (Burnette, Kwitowski, & Mazzeo, 2017).

The friendship experience during adolescence has also been found to influence feelings of self-esteem and depression amongst adolescent girls. For example, inauthenticity in relationships has been found to be associated with feelings of low self-esteem and depression (Tolman et al., 2006). On the other hand, friendships that were perceived to be satisfying and intimate amongst adolescents have been associated with higher self-esteem and lower feelings of anxiety and depression (Buhrmester, 1990).

As a result of adolescents facing a multitude of mental health difficulties, Briggs (2009) argues for a focus on the context of adolescence and how this may affect the developmental processes of adolescence. A contextual approach to female adolescent development will be discussed in further detail.

2.5.3.3 A contextual approach to female adolescent development

Within the literature on adolescent development, there has been an increased focus on the context in which adolescence takes place and the inter-connecting roles of family, community, school and peers during this developmental period (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). Bronfenbrenner (1994) suggested an individual exists and develops

within a number of systems. He argued that human development is shaped and influenced by the reciprocal relationship between an individual and their environment. Figure two below outlines Bronfenbrenner and Ceci's (1994) ecological framework for human development.

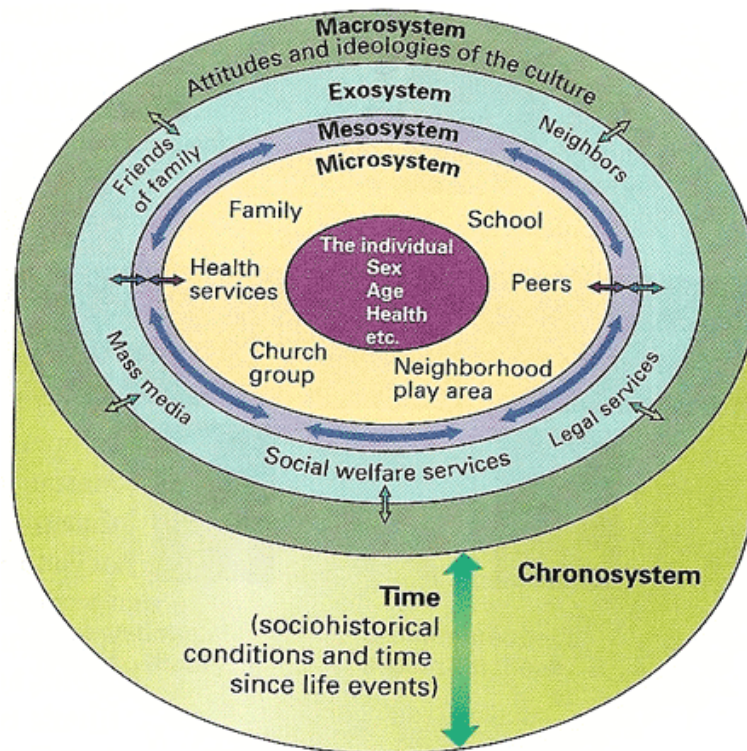


Figure 3: Bronfenbrenner and Ceci's (1994) ecological framework for human development.

This ecological perspective explores how the systems that surround an individual interact and influence development. An individual interacts with their peers, family and other adults whilst at home, school and maybe in the workplace. This is known as the *Microsystem*. They are subjected to the impact of the interactions between personal settings; between home and school. This is known as the *Mesosystem*. The individual is also influenced by systems further afield such as their parents' workplace environment and the local community. This is called the *Exosystem*. Furthermore, the individual is effected by large scale systems of society which include culture, laws and history. This is known as the *Macrosystem*. And finally, the *Chronosystem* involves the ways in which major life changes, environmental events and historical events may impact upon an individual's development.

Although Bronfenbrenner does not acknowledge the role of gender within his ecological model of development, it can be used as a framework to explore the potential impact that different systems may have on female adolescents.

In addition to the essential role that context can play in the development of an individual, Greene (2003) has argued for a “dynamic and time-conscious approach” to understanding development amongst females (p.38). She suggested that time plays a central role to how one understands their daily life and where they are located within their life journey.

2.5.4 Summary

Adolescent development reflects a period of considerable change including neurological and psycho-social changes. The context and time in which adolescence takes place can play an important role in understanding the development of adolescent girls. Given that we are in a new technological era with an increased access to SM, it remains unclear how these changes may be impacting upon the psychological development of adolescent girls.

The following sections will explore the role of SM use amongst adolescents. UK based research on SM with a sample of both boys and girls will be critically reviewed first followed by research into SM use amongst adolescent girls.

2.6 UK based research on SM use amongst adolescents

2.6.1 Impact on sleep

Research into SM use and sleep suggest there may be an association between reported night time use of SM and feeling tired in the day. For example, Power, Taylor, and Horton (2017) suggest 22.5% of 14 to 15-year olds (from a sample of 966 young people aged 12-15 in Wales) have reported nearly always waking up during the night to use SM and over a third have reported checking their SM during the night across the week. Girls aged 12 to 13 reported to have done this more than boys the same age. Their results also suggested that young people aged 12 to 13 who wake in the night to use SM appear three times more likely to say they “almost always” feel tired for school compared to young people the same age who do not use SM during the night. This study drew upon data collected from a longitudinal study which explored reported bedtime routines, patterns of sleep, wake times, SM use

during the night, tiredness and the wellbeing of young people. This study draws upon a secondary data source therefore the accuracy and validity of the data remains unknown. However, the results highlight the potential impact that engaging with SM during the night may have on feeling tired during the day. Research suggests there is an association between sleep difficulties and feelings of anxiety and depression amongst adolescents (Alfano, Zakem, Costa, Taylor, & Weems, 2009) therefore night time use of SM is an important aspect of young people's use of SM which requires further exploration.

Young peoples' reported SM use at night time has also been associated with increased feelings of depression and anxiety. For example, Woods and Scott (2016) suggested there may be a relationship between the amount of time one spends on SM alongside how much one is emotionally invested in the sites, with poor quality sleep and increased feelings of depression and anxiety. In addition, they suggested there may be an association between the overall reported use, using SM specifically at night time and the amount one is emotionally invested in the sites with lower perceptions of self-esteem. These researchers administered questionnaires to 467 Scottish young people aged 11 – 17 years old to explore their reported sleep quality, feelings of anxiety and depression, self-confidence, emotional investment in SM and overall and night-time specific use of SM. No lifestyle habits were explored such as diet, exercise level or sleep hygiene routine therefore a qualitative approach to young peoples' experiences of SM may provide a contextual insight into night time SM use and its impact on a young persons' mental wellbeing.

2.6.2 SM and identity

Identity can be perceived as a dynamic, layered and multi-faceted concept. I have provided a definition below from Cross and Madson (1997) who draw upon the relationship between identity and culture:

The self is a dynamic cultural creation; individuals' self-views, emotions, and motivations take shape and form within a framework provided by cultural values, ideals, structures, and practices. (Cross & Madson, 1997, p.6)

The internet can allow users to experiment with how they choose to represent their identity online (Thiel, 2005). Erikson (1968) has highlighted the important role identity can play during adolescent development. SM has enabled adolescents to communicate frequently with friends, post details about their lives to others and observe others' behaviour online. Due to the extent at which young people use SM, these platforms may play a part in the identity development of adolescents.

A study by Livingstone (2008) suggests that SM use plays a role in the identity formation of young people. Livingstone (2008) carried out 16 interviews in the homes of adolescents aged 13 – 16 (8 girls and 8 boys) living in London. The interviews explored why the young people behaved online as they did, how they perceived others' profiles and what meanings they gave to their relationships with people both online and offline. The following themes were derived from these interviews; "enacting identity", "transitions in identity development" and "creating private spaces for intimacy among friends" (p.399 – 404).

Participants described various ways in which they represented the online self, from decorating their pages to posting nice comments. Some adolescents spent more time than others on updating their profiles as they felt the layout was an important reflection of the self. However, some profiles were perceived as "just a front" (p. 399). These profiles appeared to play a more important role within the peer network as a place-marker rather than as a self- portrait which reflected true, personal information. For example, one young person explained that he had been "pulled into the world of Bebo" (p.399) because his peers were talking about it (Bebo is an older SM website). He therefore made his profile into a joke with very different demographics to his own such as his age and location. Another young person described how his peers will take photographs when they socialize together and then post these on their profiles thus reflecting a sense of self which is part of a peer group. This study outlined the importance of SM use as an emerging topic however technology has evolved over the past ten years making SM more accessible to young people. The technological landscape is different now compared to ten years ago therefore further research is needed to explore how adolescent girls may use current SM websites and apps as part of their identity formation.

In addition to Livingstone's findings, Wang and Edwards (2016) demonstrated how SM use can enable young people (aged 11 to 16 in the UK) to maintain and engage with a self-project by partaking in highly reflexive relationships. Their results suggested that young people report using SM to welcome, build and explore within relationships that already exist. These relationships, which are maintained through SM, can provide young people with opportunities to gain an increased understanding of their self-identities; Giddens, (1991) suggests other people can heavily influence an individual's self-identity. SM has increased connectivity between young people therefore more research is needed into how SM and the increased connectivity between its users may be impacting upon the identity formation of young people. This study has highlighted the role SM can play in the identity formation of adolescents however, the identity formation of an 11-year-old may be very different from that of a 16-year-old. Further research into adolescents of a specific age may provide more detail into the role SM may play in adolescent identity formation.

Furthermore, findings from a study by Berriman and Thomson (2015) demonstrated how some young people (aged 11-15 from Brighton in the UK) carefully considered what they posted on SM and used different screen names, avoided posting photographs of themselves and created false identities in order to maintain anonymity. The researchers carried out interviews with individuals and their families, looked at self-documentation and carried out observations over a 12-month period to explore young peoples' media practices. The low visibility but high participation on SM appeared to enable the young people to take more risks in their online behaviour. For example, one boy aged 15 posted videos of games and music to his YouTube channel but he has never recorded himself and posted it to his channel. With a dream of becoming a serious gamer or a musician, he navigated the benefits of SM (reaching a wide audience) against the costs (vulnerable to negative comments) by remaining anonymous in order to protect and enhance his identity as a musician and a gamer. This is an illuminating study that challenges negative stereotypes of SM use. A more nuanced understanding into how young people use SM, via qualitative methods, may help to highlight what young people perceive to be both the advantages *and* disadvantages of using SM.

Further research into identity and SM use has been carried out by Doster (2013) who adopted a top down approach to test theories of self-presentation, self-identity and impression management across 20 Bebo profiles belonging to young people aged 14 to 16 years old in the West Midlands (in the UK). The researcher used content analysis to analyse the Bebo profiles. The results suggested young people employ five key strategies to present their identity;

1. They presented their core self which included posts related to their face, body and skills. Doster (2013) highlighted how physical appearance was of the utmost importance and photographs of the user's face were markedly displayed in their profile photo.
2. The young people embellished their self-presentation using the design features available on the site such as the skins (background colour, layout and images) and profile narratives (description of the user). An *aesthetic self* was created by applying creative and technological skills which presented both the core self (personality and gender) and the extended self (opinions and interests).
3. Interests, opinions and activities were shared to extend their self. For example, users shared photographs, video clips and music as well as their profile narrative to display their lifestyle choices to their audience.
4. Relationships with groups, family and friends were shared to extend their self. For example, users drew upon the number of friends and the relationship status feature of the site alongside sharing their own photographs and videos to demonstrate their relationships.
5. The young people extended their self by embedding objects, celebrities and brands into their profile narrative, skins, groups and photographs. This appeared to connect themselves with their chosen social group.

In addition, Doster (2013) suggested young people use their behaviour to present their core and extended self. For example, by posting on each other's walls, leaving comments and completing voting polls, the young people communicated their individual identity (intelligence, personality) and their social identity (gender differences, social power). Although the SM platform which was used in this study (Bebo) appears to have lost its popularity amongst adolescents today, it still shares many of its features (including the posting of photographs, text and videos) with SM apps such as Facebook and Instagram. Doster (2013) also highlighted how young

people can apply the features of SM to produce an “aesthetic teen self” (p.277) which reflected a more embellished version of the self. Now that SM is more widely available, with an increased focus on photograph-based platforms, more research is needed to explore how young people present themselves online and the impact of this on their mental wellbeing.

2.7 Adolescent girls and SM use

The following sections will critically discuss aspects of SM within the literature which relate exclusively to adolescent girls and their use of SM.

2.7.1 Feeling addicted to SM

Research suggests individuals who suffer from low self-esteem and depressive character traits can be vulnerable to becoming addicted to SM (Hong, Huang, Lin, & Chiu, 2014). In order to explore how girls construct their social relationships on SM and what meaning they give to the way they behave on SM, Brandes and Levin (2014) carried out eight focus groups with 35 Jewish girls aged from 12 to 18 years old. Their results highlighted that these girls reported spending a lot of time on SM, especially during the holidays. The girls described feeling worried that they would miss out on events if they did not sign into Facebook regularly (Brandes & Levin, 2014). The social phenomenon “Fear of Missing Out Addiction” attempts to explain why some girls reported feeling pressured to be online continuously and to keep abreast of their social networks (Brandes & Levin, 2014, p.752). This need to continuously be in touch with peers seems to be an essential part of establishing one’s place within a network of friends (Livingstone, 2008). However, it is unclear whether a 12-year-old may have a different experience to a 15-year-old as the sample ranged from 12 to 18-year olds. The adolescent period is a time of great change therefore more research into SM use is needed with girls at a specific point during this developmental period.

2.7.2 SM and body image

Girls appear to have a poorer body image compared to boys (Perry & Pauletti, 2011). Research suggests they invest in the ideal of being thin, negatively compare themselves with female models in the media and view themselves as being larger than their peers (Harter, 2006). As a result, they can suffer from dissatisfaction with their bodies. The media, including movies, TV and magazines, plays a large role in

portraying an ideal body image which is often very thin (Grabe, Ward, & Hyde, 2008). Research suggests adolescents compare themselves to the desirable images portrayed in the media (Kraye, Ingledew, & Iphofen, 2008) demonstrating how social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) can contribute to the way in which an adolescent perceives their body. Peers can also play a role in the comparison process and girls as young as eight have been found to engage in appearance-related comparison behaviours amongst their peers (Tatangelo & Ricciardelli, 2017).

The instability of identity during adolescence may lead girls to feeling more vulnerable to the “perfect” image portrayed on SM by peers and other users. SM have a large activity of uploading and sharing images amongst its users with the most prominent site being Instagram in which it bases its main purpose on uploading, editing and sharing images.

A study into teenage girls’ experiences of SM and body image concerns was carried out in Australia by Tiggemann and Slater (2013). They asked 1087 girls in Australia aged between 13 and 15 to complete a questionnaire titled “NetGirls”. This questionnaire covered two topics; Internet use (including access to SM) and body image concerns. The results from both the Internet use questions and the body image concerns questions suggested there was a correlation between increased Internet use and concerns about body image (including internalization of what constitutes as the beauty ideal, body surveillance and drive to be thin). In addition, those girls who used Facebook received higher scores on the measures related to body image concerns compared to those girls who did not use Facebook. More specifically, the number of friends on Facebook appeared to be linked with each body image concern. This research highlighted a possible relationship between SM use and body image concerns. However, this study does not explain the direction and mechanisms of the relationship between SM use and body image concerns. In addition, data gathered from questionnaires can be vulnerable to participants misinterpreting the questions and context around an answer is often left out. Qualitative research which uses interviews to gather data, may help young people to provide more detail and context of their experiences of SM and body image concerns. A qualitative approach may shed light on the direction and mechanisms of SM use and body image concerns.

In America, Meier and Gray (2014) found similar results to Tiggeman and Slater (2013). They explored body dissatisfaction and Facebook use amongst 103 adolescent girls aged between 12 and 18. Each girl completed an online questionnaire which included questions about their demographics, internalization of the ideal thin body type, comparison behaviours related to appearance, satisfaction with their weight, drive to be thin, attitudes and behaviours that reflected self-objectification, Internet and Facebook use and Facebook exposure to appearance-related content. Their results suggested there could be a bidirectional relationship between specific Facebook use and a drive to be thin / dissatisfaction with one's body image. Meier and Gray (2014) suggested girls who have a high internalization of the ideal thin body type and are dissatisfied with their body image are motivated to explore the photo-related features on Facebook. Therefore, regular Facebook activity which is related to appearance (for instance looking at photo-related posts) can reinforce or exacerbate already existing issues around body image. The girls' responses suggested the more they were exposed to appearance-related photographs on Facebook, the more dissatisfied they were with their weight. Although this study is correlational in design therefore does not evidence a clear cause and effect relationship between Facebook use and body image concerns, it does highlight a possible *relationship* between SM use and body image concerns in adolescent girls. Further research may be helpful to provide more detail into the relationship between SM use and body image concerns.

Tiggemann and Slater (2017) have recently published results from their longitudinal design which explored a possible cause and effect relationship between using Facebook and concerns with body image amongst adolescent girls over two years. The researchers administered questionnaires twice to 438 Australian girls aged between 13 and 15 (time one) and two years later (time two). Their results suggested the amount of time spent using Facebook at time one significantly correlated with feelings of internalization and body image scrutiny at time two. The number of Facebook friends at time one predicted a rise in the drive to be thin and internalization at time two. In addition, internalization and body image scrutiny predicted the higher number of Facebook friends. It may be helpful to explore other variables such as life experience, exposure to other forms of media, hobbies and

interests in future research into body image concerns amongst adolescent girl as these may also contribute to body dissatisfaction.

Another study into SM use and body image has highlighted how important self-presentation and image on SM can be amongst teenage girls aged 12 to 16 in Singapore (Chua & Chang, 2016) . The researchers carried out in-depth interviews with 24 girls to explore their accounts of self-presentation (posting photographs) and experiences of peer comparison on Instagram. Two themes emerged from these interviews; “presentation of edited beauty and feedback from peers” (p.192). The girls in this study appeared to meticulously plan and edit the photographs they posted in order to produce a “beautiful” selfie. For example, they reported the use of a range of filters and photo-editing tools to illuminate their skin and remove spots. These images appeared to meet the social norms of physical beauty and enabled the girls to feel “pretty enough” to peers (p.193). In line with Festinger’s social comparison theory (1954), the girls appeared to compare themselves to peers despite admitting that this behaviour was not useful. However, they explained that it remains unavoidable due to the ubiquity of SM. This study highlighted the possible role SM can play in the social construction of beauty due to exposure to other images alongside comparing one’s looks against others.

Similarly, results by Burnette, Kwitowski, and Mazzeo (2017) elude to the culture of social comparison whilst using SM amongst girls aged 12 to 14 in the USA. Burnette et al (2017) carried out six focus groups with a total of 38 adolescent girls. Overall, the girls appeared dissatisfied with their attractiveness and some girls explained that they do not post selfies because they do not feel confident in their appearance and at times feel uniquely unattractive in selfies. More research with girls in the UK is needed to explore their experiences of self-presentation on SM and the possible relationship between self-presentation on SM and mental wellbeing.

2.7.3 SM and feedback

Users of SM can leave comments and react to others’ posts by liking them. This feedback appears to be important to young people and users of SM will regularly update their profiles in order to sustain the attention of their peers (Doster, 2013). Brandes and Levin’s (2014) study into Israeli girls’ experiences of SM highlighted how the number of friends, likes and comments played an essential role in the girls

being perceived as popular. The need to construct an image which was attractive to and popular amongst other SM users appeared to dominate the girls' thinking and at times caused feelings of stress. It remains unclear whether girls in the UK are having a similar experience to the Israeli girls in Brandes and Levin's study.

Feedback on SM has also been found to play a role in the identity formation of adolescent girls. For example, Jong and Drummond (2016) demonstrated how feedback on SM can play a role in shaping the identity of teenage girls in Australia. The researchers carried out five semi-structured focus groups with 28 girls aged 12 to 14 years old to explore their experiences of SM and the impact that immediate feedback may have on their identity, body image and self-esteem. Their results suggested that female users of SM, in particular Facebook, desired immediate feedback from other SM users to posts, in particular photographs, they put up online. This immediate feedback appeared to play a role in the self and social-validation, the identity formation and self-esteem of the sample. The girls' description of the photos that were posted appeared to reflect the broader cultural ideals linked with the concepts of beauty and popularity. Jong and Drummond (2016) draw our attention to the immediacy of this feedback being novel to identity formation in this generation of adolescents as the digital connectedness has enabled immediate responses. Similar research is required in the UK to explore how British girls respond to feedback on their SM activity.

2.7.4 Friendships, SM and adolescent girls

The formation of the self can play an important role in developing and defining a sense of identity. Markus and Kitayama (1991) suggest individuals structure their identity either with others as separate from the self or as others as part of the self. For individuals who see others as part of themselves, relationships and belonging to social groups can shape an identity as "connected to others" (Cross & Madson, 1997, p.7). These relationships can be seen as a central part of an individual's identity (Cross & Madson, 1997). Relationships with others can play a large role in the lives of women as they appear more likely to describe themselves in terms of affiliation with others compared to men (Cross & Madson, 1997).

Friendships that are formed during early adolescence (12 to 16 years of age) are often more intense than at any other time in a young person's life and can have a

large influence on the development of an individual's personality, social behaviour and social skills (Douvan & Adelson, 1966). Close friends and peers make up the majority of those involved in the social interactions of adolescents as they acquire greater independence from their parents (Berndt, 1982). The intimacy experienced in adolescent relationships can support feelings of self-esteem and reduce feelings of hostility and depression (Buhrmester, 1990).

Friendships between girls are often more intimate and intense compared to friendships between boys and can involve fewer girls (Berndt, 1982). Girls appear to engage in a "best friend culture" (Tufte, 2003, p.72) where they will talk for hours with one other friend. Rose and Rudolph (2006) suggest adolescent girls can experience more trust, affection, enhancement of worth and loyalty in their friendships compared to boys.

Females appear to use SM and the Internet more so to stay in contact with existing friends and to establish new friendships (Barker, 2009) compared to boys who prefer computer games (Tufte, 2003). Brandes and Levin, (2014) suggested SM can play a role in the maintaining of girl friendships. The girls appeared to invest in their girlfriends by, for example, writing on each other's walls, liking each other's statuses or pictures and writing birthday messages. This behaviour helped them to feel popular and loved by someone. Facebook enabled them to generate a close, exclusive, female social space where they could rely upon each other and partake in mutual support. It is unclear how the data was analysed in this study and what steps were taken to demonstrate validity in the research. However, the findings have provided specific behaviours which adolescent girls partake in when using SM to maintain their friendships. Future qualitative research should provide a description of the data analysis process and outline ways in which validity has been demonstrated.

Girls do not always partake in positive, kind behaviours when maintaining friendships over SM. Ging and O'Higgins Norman (2016) bring our attention to a conflicting narrative of girl friendships from a sample of 26 girls aged 11-17 from an all-girls, Catholic school in Ireland. The researchers employed three data collection techniques to explore adolescent girls' reported experiences and understandings of online friendships, conflict and bullying. They distributed a questionnaire to 116 students and subsequently carried out interviews with 26 self-selected students. One

of the key findings from the interview data suggested girl friendships can be complex. For example, the sample appeared to provide a contradicting narrative around their perception of everybody in school being “really nice” (p.811) but also explaining that “there is quite a lot of bitchiness” (p.813). They described experiencing conflict online and demonstrated a higher preoccupation with peer inclusion and exclusion than originally shown. Being popular (as demonstrated by the number of friends and comments), managing the photos posted of themselves by others and posting the appropriate amount of suitable content reflected common behaviours that they reportedly carried out on SM when maintaining their friendships. Ging and O’Higgins Norman (2016) drew upon a sample that was taken from an all-girls, school in Ireland. More research is needed with a sample from the UK to explore how adolescent girls navigate their friendships over SM.

2.7.4.1 SM, cyber bullying and girls

Recent research suggests cyber bullying can have an effect on a young person’s perception of school and learning. Betts, Spencer and Gardner (2017) asked 285 young people aged 11- to 15 in the UK to fill out several questionnaires. The questionnaires covered the following topics; experiences of cyber-bullying, feelings of self-worth, ability to trust others, perceptions of being accepted by their peers, attitudes towards how valuable they believe *learning* to be and the significance of school. The results suggested that those girls who reported experiencing cyber bullying (either as a bully or a victim) held more negative perceptions of school and learning. The amount of perceived peer acceptance appeared to play a role in this relationship; involvement in cyber bullying predicted lower perceived peer acceptance and perceived peer acceptance predicted optimistic attitudes towards learning and school. This study highlights the role supportive peers can play in protecting girls against the negative effects of cyber bullying. Further research which adopts a qualitative method such as interviews could provide teenage girls with an opportunity to add a more humanistic account to their experiences of cyber-bullying.

Cyber bullying amongst girls on SM does not appear to be straight forward. Findings by Ging and O’Higgins Norman (2016) suggested the conflict experienced by adolescent girls can blur the lines between cyber bullying and a means to vent anger at or about friends (or both). When faced with conflict, girls commonly ignored or deleted hurtful comments. They appeared to continuously downplay the significance

and seriousness of cyber bullying despite describing cases of online conflict. For example, behaviours such as nasty comments or insulting tagging were downplayed as “messaging”, “slagging” or “bitchy fights” (p.816) instead of being perceived as cyber bullying. Ging and O’Higgins Norman (2016) drew upon a wide age range of adolescent girls, from 11 to 17. More research is needed into girls of a specific age to explore how girls who are at the same stage in adolescent development experience conflict amongst their peers on SM.

2.8 Summary of the research

The following is a summary of the research into SM use with adolescents;

- Data is often collected via self-report measures.
- Studies are often correlational in their design.
- Studies often include a sample with a wide age-range of adolescence.
- Studies which include only girls in their sample are outside of the UK.
- There are no current studies into the EP voice on the topic of SM use amongst adolescent girls.

2.9 The current study and the research questions

The current study aims to elicit the voice of adolescent girls and the EP profession on the topic of SM use. There is a lack of research which explores adolescent girls’ reported experiences and reflections of their use of SM in the UK using a rich, qualitative research method. The aim of this research is to contribute significant and original knowledge to the growing research base by uncovering the advantages and disadvantages of SM use as perceived by adolescent girls along with EP reflections on this topic. It is hoped that this study will provide a greater understanding of why adolescent girls use SM, what they perceive to be the advantages and disadvantages of these online platforms and how they manage the disadvantages. In addition, it is hoped that this piece of research will provide an insight into how the EP profession can support young people, parents and professionals to understand why adolescent girls use SM and the possible impact SM use may be having on young peoples’ mental wellbeing.

The following research questions for the adolescent girls will be addressed;

1. What are the reported experiences of SM use by adolescent girls?
2. What are the advantages of using SM as perceived by adolescent girls?
3. What are the disadvantages of using SM as perceived by adolescent girls?
4. How do adolescent girls manage the disadvantages of SM?

The following research questions for the EPs will be addressed;

1. Why may adolescent girls behave as they do on SM?
2. What may be the potential impact of SM use on adolescent girls?
3. How can the EP profession support young people, families and school staff to safely navigate SM?

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction to chapter

This chapter aims to provide the reader with an explanation of the term *methodology* followed by a reflection of alternative research paradigms and a rationale for the chosen research paradigm. The strengths and weaknesses will be outlined for the chosen research paradigm. Three alternative methodological approaches will be evaluated and then thematic analysis (the method chosen for the data analysis) will be critically discussed. A description and critical examination of the chosen methods that were employed in this study will be provided. The ways in which I thought about the process of validity and quality will be outlined using a set of principles suggested by Yardley (2014). Finally, the ways in which ethical concerns were addressed will be explained.

3.2 What is methodology?

Methodology relates to the ways in which the researcher organised and carried out the research project; including the theoretical and practical features of conducting research. It needs to generate the appropriate knowledge which will answer the research questions (Oliver, 2014). If the methodological orientation is not harmonious with the aim and intention of the study, the research question(s) may not be answered effectively.

The methodology outlines the decisions that were made during the research process and the justification as to why such decisions have been made. It is argued that the methodology that a researcher chooses is rooted in their values, which in turn, inform the moral and ethical responses to understanding a problem (Clough & Nutbrown, 2007). My own experiences of using SM, values and previous experience of carrying out research have influenced the methodological decisions which were taken in order to answer the research questions.

3.3 Chosen research paradigm

3.3.1 Introduction to this section

A paradigm reflects the beliefs held by the researcher and shapes the research process; it influences the chosen topic of study, how the research should be carried out and how the data should be interpreted (Bryman, 1988). The concept “research

paradigm” is used in this study to reflect the assumptions that I made about ontology (assumptions made about the world and people) and epistemology (assumptions made about how one understands the world). Ontology and epistemology will be discussed first followed by a reflection upon the research position in relation to these two philosophical assumptions. A justification will be provided for the chosen research paradigm as well as an explanation of how the chosen research paradigm relates to the objectives of this study, the chosen methods of data collection and the data analysis.

3.3.2 Ontology

Ontology relates to the reality that is under investigation. It is derived from the Greek word *on* for “being” and *logia* for “study”. Assumptions made about the nature of the world can sit along a continuum with a realist ontological position at one end and a constructionist ontological position at the other. A realist ontology reflects a reality that is objective and exists independently of the individuals that live within it (Denscombe, 2010). It reflects a world that is made up of structures and objects which interact with one another through a cause-effect relationship. It can be measured and the structures and relationships within this reality are relatively stable.

A constructionist ontology reflects a reality that is a product of an individual’s perception and understanding of it (Hammersley, 2007). Multiple realities exist and the nature of the social world can vary between different cultures or groups of people. Researchers who adopt this ontological position are concerned with the difference in interpretations that can be applied to the “out-there-ness” of the world (Willig, 2013). They are not looking for a definitive explanation of social phenomena but instead seek to explain how people construct their realities (Denscombe, 2010).

3.3.3 Epistemology

Epistemology derives from the Greek term *epistêmê* meaning knowledge. It reflects the philosophy of knowledge and how we come to know what we know (Willig, 2013). Two key epistemological positions that researchers can take include *positivism* and *interpretivism*. A researcher who adopts a positivist position assumes there is order in the social world; “patterns and regularities, causes and consequences” (Denscombe, 2010, p.120) occur in the social world as they do in the natural world. A traditional positivist approach to knowledge begins with the development of a hypothesis which

is based on an existing theory (Moriarty, 2011). The researcher then seeks knowledge by applying methods from the natural sciences (Bryman, 2008) which seek value free and objective facts (Robson, 2002).

In comparison, an interpretive approach rejects the view that knowledge or truths about the social world can be understood by applying natural science methods. An interpretive approach views people as “conscious, purposive actors who have ideas about their world and attach meaning to what is going on around them” (Robson, 2002, p.24). It assumes that reality is subjective, and it is constructed and then interpreted by those who experience it. It is a *social* creation which is reinforced via interactions between people (Denscombe, 2010). Interpretivism relates to the meanings that human beings place on their social reality (Bryman, 2008) therefore researchers who adopt this epistemological stance focus their research on how people create and make sense of their social world via their behaviour and interpretations of their reality (Denscombe 2010).

3.3.4 Explanation and rationale for chosen research paradigm of this study

“I suggest that we should think about the research process as a form of adventure” (Willig, 2013 p.4). In order to answer the research questions, an exploratory approach was adopted; one that reflected an adventure.

Much of the previous research into the advantages and disadvantages of SM has been influenced by positivist and realist ontological assumptions. Quantitative methodologies appear to dominate the literature to try to explain the possible impact SM use may be having on the mental wellbeing of its users. A positivist epistemology and realist ontology was rejected for this study as I did not want to assume that all scientific knowledge is objective, measurable and value-free (Bryman, 2008).

Instead, an interpretive epistemology and constructionist ontology has been assumed to reflect the belief that humans experience multiple realities and these realities are subjective and individual (Krauss, 2005). This assumption led to the adoption of a constructivist interpretive research paradigm which suggests there

is not one true, objective reality but each person's reality is created in different ways (Fox, 2003).

A qualitative methodology was chosen over a quantitative methodology in order to answer the exploratory research questions. A qualitative approach can enable claims to be made from gathering rich data which is derived from a curious and flexible approach to research (Braun & Clarke 2013). An inductive, bottom-up approach was adopted therefore theory did not guide the research (Bryman, 2008). The focus of this study was to elicit the voice of adolescent girls on how and why they use SM and to explore the potential impact of SM use on the mental wellbeing of adolescent girls. The aim of the focus group with EPs was to explore how educational psychology can be applied to understanding and supporting adolescent girls' uses of SM.

3.3.5 Strengths and weaknesses of the chosen research paradigm

A potential strength of this chosen research paradigm is that a gap will be filled in the literature. The young person's voice is missing within the UK literature on the reported experience and perspectives of SM use amongst adolescent girls. A qualitative approach is intended to provide a rich, contextual and detailed picture of adolescent girls' reported experiences of using SM. An interpretive constructivist research paradigm is intended to illuminate how adolescent girls construct their realities in relation to SM use.

The EP voice is also missing in the literature in relation to this topic. The chosen paradigm will enable an in-depth exploration of the reported experiences and knowledge amongst EPs on the topic of SM use amongst adolescent girls.

One weakness of this research paradigm is that it will not be possible to generalise the findings from either the interviews or the focus group to other young people or EPs. Given the proliferation of SM use amongst adolescents, this will limit the utility of the results as the researcher will be unable to make claims about possible trends within the sample or make predictions about the future implications of SM use.

However, this study does not intend to generalise the findings but instead offer an in depth, detailed account of SM use from the perspective of adolescent girls. It will provide a space for their voices to be heard on a subject matter which directly affects them. It is hoped that the interview data will help others to understand why adolescent girls use SM and how SM use may have a positive or detrimental effect on mental wellbeing. In addition, the focus group will provide a space for EPs to discuss their psychological knowledge and experience which is relevant to SM use amongst young people. It is hoped that this data will provide an example of how one team of EPs can apply psychological theories and models to help support young people with their SM use.

The choices that were made in relation to the methods to collect and analyse the data in this piece of research are related to the selected research paradigm. The rationale for choosing thematic analysis as a method to analyse the data, is explained in the following section.

3.4 Consideration of alternative methodologies

I considered and subsequently rejected three methodological approaches before deciding upon thematic analysis (TA) as an appropriate method for answering the exploratory research questions for this study. The process of evaluation will be outlined below.

3.4.1 Grounded theory

Grounded theory is an inductive methodology; the research process produces theory (Bryman, 2008). The researcher constructs a theory on the topic being studied whilst grounding it in the data that is collected (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The researcher does not bring a preconceived theory to the topic being studied but instead approaches a topic with an open mind and allows for a theory to develop as a result of the data being gathered and analysed. A literature review is carried out after the data has been collected and analysed to reflect upon how theory derived from the data fits with other work in the field (Charmaz, 1996). Data is handled and interpreted rigorously via a process of “description, definition and specification of relationships” (Martin & Turner, 1986, p.143). The researcher begins with individual pieces of data and develops increasingly abstract concepts progressively throughout the data collection and data analysis stage. This enables the researcher to

synthesize, understand and clarify the data resulting in identified patterned relationships within the data set (Charmaz, 1996).

There is a gap in the literature on adolescents' reported experiences of SM. Well-established theories into SM use amongst adolescents, in particular adolescent girls, have not yet been developed therefore a grounded theory approach to understanding this topic would have suited the exploratory nature of this study. However, due to my experience of using SM and interest in the topic before embarking on the research process, key papers in the literature and a wide range of associated topics had already been explored prior to the data collection and analysis stages. I therefore felt it was not possible to begin data collection with a completely open mind. Grounded theory can also be time consuming due to the data collection and data-analysis processes that occur simultaneously (Charmaz, 1996).

Grounded theory could have produced a new theory within an emerging field of research (SM use amongst young people). It could have further developed our understanding of adolescent girls' reported experiences of SM. However, due to the limited timescale for data collection and the restricted availability of participants, a grounded theory approach was not chosen for this study.

3.4.2 Multiple Case study

A multiple case study approach was considered for this study. This methodology can enable an investigation into a phenomenon within its context whilst drawing on a range of data sources (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This detailed approach to understanding a particular case can allow for the generation of theories on social or psychological processes (Willig, 2008).

I considered gathering data from young people, school staff, parents and other professionals from a range of settings, to gain an understanding of SM use through different lenses. This exploration could have enabled multiple facets of SM use to be discovered and understood. However, due to the gap in the research into the voice of young people in the UK, I felt it was important to allow the girls to have a voice on a topic which has a direct impact upon them. I also felt it was necessary for the EP

profession to be heard and I hoped to raise the awareness and understanding of the topic amongst the profession.

As the research on SM develops, a case study approach could help to explore the perspectives of different users of SM. Given how widely used SM has become, this insight into other perspectives could provide an insight into how different people use SM in different ways. However, this study has a focus on adolescent girls' reported experiences of SM and how this topic is relevant to the EP profession therefore a case study approach was not chosen.

3.4.3 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

IPA seeks to explore how an individual makes sense of their lived experiences (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). It draws upon *phenomenology* (the study of experience) and *hermeneutics* (interpretation). It is a methodology that produces an *interpretation* of an individual's lived experience (Willig, 2013) and is often applied to small samples to provide an in depth, comprehensive analysis of experience.

The interpretation is derived from questions during the data analysis phase such as "what is the person trying to achieve here?", "Do I have a sense of something going on here that the person himself or herself is perhaps less aware of?" (Pietkiewicz & Smith, p.8, 2014). The researcher draws upon their assumptions about the world in an attempt to advance their understanding of the social phenomena under study (Willig, 2008). Initially themes are identified within a data set and can then be identified across data sets to make more general claims.

TA and IPA share a similar purpose as they both aim to identify patterns and themes in the data in order to make sense of an individual's experience (Smith & Osborn, 2015; Braun & Clarke, 2013). IPA could have provided an in depth and comprehensive insight into the reported experiences of SM amongst adolescent girls. Themes could have been derived from each individual experience of using SM as well as across the data set.

However, I felt TA was more appropriate due to the level of interpretation that IPA is required to go into. I did not want to detract from the voices of the sample as a result

of a high level of interpretation. It is also required that researchers of IPA follow a set of guidelines during the data analysis stage (Willig, 2008). Although Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) argue that these guidelines “should not be treated as a recipe” (p.11), I felt that TA would provide a more flexible approach to data analysis. I wanted to keep the exploration broad and allow for differences of reported experiences and perspectives to emerge thus TA was chosen for this study.

3.4.4 Thematic analysis (TA)

TA is a way in which qualitative data can be analysed. During the analysis, themes emerge as a result of recognising patterns in the data which are of significance to the phenomenon being studied (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Without themes, the data would not allow the researcher to describe, compare or explain the topic under investigation (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). TA is not a methodology but a method. It is a flexible approach to analysing data and it can be used to answer a range of research questions, for example people’s reported experiences, understandings and perspectives (Braun & Clarke, 2013). It is therefore applicable to making sense of data from the interviews and the focus group in this study. It is compatible within the research paradigm *constructivist-interpretivism* therefore reflects the epistemological assumptions I have made about the construction of knowledge.

Braun and Clarke (2013) highlight the importance of developing the necessary researcher skills through actively *doing* qualitative research. As a trainee EP who had previously applied TA in two research projects, it seemed sensible to apply a method which I had acquired confidence in.

More detail will be provided on the steps that I took during the thematic analysis in section 3.5.5.

3.5 Method

3.5.1 Pilot Interview

A pilot interview was carried out with a friend’s daughter aged 15, prior to the eight interviews. It enabled me to clarify how long an interview may take and ensured I understood how to use the recording equipment in context; details which helped me to turn my “design into reality” (Robson, 2002, p.383). I was able to practise the skills

required to carry out a quality interview, for example the ability to interpret the participant's answers throughout the interview (Kvale, 1996).

The pilot interview also allowed for the appropriateness of the topic guide to be tested (Bryman, 2008). I was keen to ensure the topic guide led to data which would answer the research questions (Hugh-Jones, 2010). However, I did not want to ask the research questions directly to the participants. As a result of the pilot interview, I changed the wording from advantages and disadvantages to positives and negatives of SM use so that the research questions were not asked directly to the participants. I also added two new questions to encourage the girls to think about when someone should definitely or definitely not use SM and why they thought this. This provided an opportunity for them to add detail to their thoughts around the advantages and disadvantages of using SM.

I also added in a question which asked how the young people themselves would define SM. This was added after discussing the pilot interview and the literature with my supervisor who suggested it may be helpful to explore how the girls themselves interpret the term "SM". Please see Appendix C for a table which demonstrates further changes that were made.

However, I did not limit my questions to those on the topic guide. I chose semi-structure interviews as they enable the researcher to be flexible during the data collection process and pursue interesting topics which arise out of the dialogue (Chapman & Smith, 2002). The pilot interview demonstrated my commitment to the research and the thorough approach I took to devising the topic guide. These principles, which demonstrate validity in qualitative research as outlined by Yardley (2014), are discussed in more detail in section 3.6

I did not have enough time to carry out a pilot for the focus group. This was due to having to balance my time as a practitioner and as a researcher.

3.5.2 Sampling technique

The inclusion criteria for the sample of this study was one secondary school who was willing to take part and eight girls, aged between 14 and 15 years old, who use SM websites or apps.

I introduced myself to the Year 10 girls during an assembly in the Autumn term 2017 and explained the research process. A random sampling technique was adopted: I numbered each girl in Year 10 on a print out of the whole year group and then wrote each number on a square piece of paper. I folded up these pieces of paper and put them into an empty waste paper bin and picked out, at random, eight numbers. I then matched the numbers against those on the print out and sent out information sheets and consent forms to those eight girls. Due to the girls age (14 and 15), consent forms (and information sheets) were also sent to their parents to provide consent for them to take part in the research. The remaining pieces of paper were kept in a plastic wallet and put back in the waste paper bin, to repeat the random sampling technique, when two of the chosen girls declined the invitation to take part in the study.

A random sampling technique was adopted to avoid any feelings of unease as to why students had been selected and to explore both the advantages and disadvantages of SM. I did not want to only interview girls who were finding it difficult to manage their SM use despite the pastoral lead originally asking for this to be the case. Given the proliferation of SM, I felt it was important to explore both the advantages and disadvantages in order to explore why it is so popular as well as the risks that may be involved.

The key gate keeper to recruiting participants (the pastoral lead) retired from the school during the summer term 2017. I therefore spent additional time forming a new psychological contract with the school special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCo) and her personal assistant.

Four girls were recruited in 2017 before the Christmas holidays and four were recruited after the Christmas holidays. Two girls who were chosen did not want to

take part as SM had played a largely negative role in their lives. All data was gathered by February 2018.

For the focus group, I explained the study at an EP team meeting in September 2017. An email was then sent out to my team with the information sheets and consent forms. EPs and Trainee EPs responded if they were interested in taking part. Consent forms were signed electronically, and I received them over email. All data was collected by October 2017.

3.5.3 Sample

Eight students from Year ten, aged between 14 and 15, from a rural secondary school in the UK, made up the sample for this study. The girls were not from the same peer group and came from different tutor groups. They varied in their use and interest in using SM although they all used it every day. Two girls lived on a farm and one of these girls had her own pony. Their dreams and aspirations for the future varied from wanting to be a social worker, to working in fashion, to pursuing a career as a photographer and to working in childcare. Four of the girls did not yet know what they wanted to do in the future. One girl had a part-time job whilst another was currently applying to work in the local restaurant.

The rural secondary school was chosen as the pastoral lead had previously worked successfully with a trainee EP during their doctoral research project. Although she had left by the time I collected the data, the SENCo welcomed the research as SM played a large role in friendship difficulties amongst their students. The ages of the students are outlined in table one below.

Participant	Age
1	14
2	14
3	15
4	14
5	15
6	15
7	14
8	14

Table 1: Composition of the sample in this study

A report by Ofcom (2017) suggests that 74% of young people aged 12 – 15 who go online have a profile on SM. It was therefore hoped that 14-15 year olds would be able to reflect upon their usage and the advantages and disadvantages of SM use. Students in Year 10 were not yet under the pressure of studying for their GCSEs therefore taking time out to talk about their experiences of SM was unlikely to lead to any undue stress on the students.

The following table provides some basic demographic information about the school which the sample of participants was drawn from:

Academic Year 2017-2018	
Number of students on roll.	507
Number of students with an education, health and care plan (EHCP).	1
Number of children looked after.	0
Number of students with English as an additional language.	5
Number of permanent exclusions in the previous academic year.	2
Ofsted rating May 2018	Good

Table 2: Basic demographic information about the school which the sample of participants was drawn from.

The inclusion criteria for the EP focus group was an EP or Trainee EP who had an interest in discussing SM. The EP focus group consisted of five EPs and one Trainee EP. Five of these were female and one was male. The gender and age of the EPs in this study are outlined in the following table.

Gender	Age
F	28
F	30
F	32
F	34
F	34
M	32

Table 3: Composition of EP sample

3.5.4 Data collection process

Data was collected in a naturalistic setting for both sets of data. The school was used for the interviews and the local authority office was used for the focus group. I chose these settings as meeting research participants on a familiar setting can encourage them to feel more relaxed (Moriarty, 2011).

3.5.4.1 Interviewing

I put together a topic guide which included a series of questions that reflected key themes from the literature and helped to navigate the conversation with each participant (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The questions were used dynamically to allow the relationship between myself and the interviewees to develop throughout the conversation (Kvale, 1996). For example, elements of the girls' stories were asked about in more detail to help build rapport. Please see Appendix C for a copy of this topic guide.

I focused on the individual perspective of each girl's reported experience of using SM. The interview process enabled a critical and questioning approach to life experience and knowledge by asking *why* and *how* things may be the way they are (Braun & Clarke, 2013). For example, *why do you use SM?* This reflected the chosen research paradigm as the interviews enabled me to explore how each individual made sense of their own experience of using SM. The interviews ranged from 15 minutes to 65 minutes.

However, this chosen data collection technique is individualistic and can disregard the way in which a person is often embedded in social exchanges with others (Kvale, 1996). Given the importance of peers during the adolescent period, an interviewee may act very differently when around her friends compared to what she says in response to the interview questions. Taylor and Bogdan (1984) suggest that people can sometimes say and behave differently when in different situations. However, I did not feel comfortable observing the sample in their different environments whilst using SM. It was beyond the capacity and scope of this study to employ a variety of data collection techniques to explore adolescent girls' experiences of SM when in different situations.

3.5.4.1.1 Role of the researcher and interviewer

Throughout the research process, there is a difference in power between the researcher and the sample. In order to redistribute the power, I spoke to the year ten girls during an assembly in order to introduce my research and provide an opportunity for further questions on details of the study. Karnieli-Miller, Strier, and Pessach, (2009) suggest that the level of information that is provided to prospective participants about a study can help to shift the power relations as participants who receive more information can have more power.

During the interview process, knowledge is constructed *together* during the conversation. However, the interviewer fundamentally outlines the situation, introduces the topics to be discussed and steers the course of the discussion through follow up questions (Kvale, 1996). In order to minimise this asymmetrical power distribution, I thanked the interviewees upon arrival, explained the process and

provided space for any questions to be asked before the Dictaphone was turned on. The interviews were then recorded once the interviewee felt comfortable and understood the process. I carried out each interview in a relaxed way in order to create an anti-authoritative atmosphere. Karnieli-Miller et al., (2009) suggest a non-threatening environment can reduce feelings of power-inequality and enable participants to share their personal experiences.

During the interviews, I drew upon the *traveller metaphor* as outlined by Kvale (1996) to construct knowledge in collaboration with the interviewees. The interviewees were encouraged to tell their own stories of their lived realities, reflecting the Latin meaning of *conversation* as “wandering together with” (Kvale, 1996, p.4). An interview relies upon the interaction between two people and can be influenced by several factors such as one’s feelings, memories and beliefs (Hugh-Jones, 2010). A critique of the research in Chapter 5 highlights how such factors may have influenced the data demonstrating that the data analysis and interpretation is not removed from the research context.

To ensure an interview is of good quality, what is being said and the associated meanings should be “interpreted, verified and communicated by the time the tape recorder is turned off” (Kvale, 1996, p.144). In order to carry out good quality interviews, I drew upon my active listening skills and took down notes when interviewees mentioned something I later wanted to follow up or clarify.

3.5.4.2 Focus group

A focus group can provide a space for people to come together to share their views and experiences on a topic of interest without feeling any pressure to reach an agreement or make a decision (Liamputtong, 2011). It can be an efficient way of gathering a substantial amount of data (Robson, 2002) and can provide a safe space for new ideas and concepts to be stimulated (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2015).

I was unsure how much experience EPs had gained during their professional practice on the topic of SM use amongst adolescents. A focus group therefore enabled EPs to jointly construct meaning (Bryman, 2008) on SM use and the relevance of this topic to the role of the EP. The decision to carry out a focus group reflects the chosen research paradigm as it reflects a bottom-up approach to data collection and

provided a space for each EP to discuss their own experience of reality in relation to working with young people and their use of SM.

One group of six EPs (one Trainee EP) met on one single occasion for 65 minutes. This small sample number allowed for a rich discussion and was simple to manage (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

The way in which members of a focus group interact plays an essential role in the focus group process and construction of knowledge. The differences and similarities between individuals can influence the cohesiveness of the group and compatibility which in turn can impact upon the group conformity (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2015). The focus group members for this study shared a number of characteristics (these were not inclusion criteria for taking part in the study) which increased group conformity and performance:

- All were active users of SM in their personal lives.
- All had reflected upon the potential impact of SM on adolescents before taking part in the focus group.
- All had experienced an adolescence without SM therefore were able to reflect upon the differences in how generations spend their time and form and maintain friendships.
- All were interested and invested in how the EP profession can help adolescents effectively navigate SM.

I put together a topic guide to explore certain aspects of SM use. These aspects were derived from the literature and appeared pertinent to the EP role. The topic guide included only seven questions to minimise the risk of carrying out a within-group survey instead of an interactive dialogue (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2015). Please see Appendix B for a copy of this topic guide.

One weakness of a focus group is that it does not allow for in-depth accounts of individual's beliefs or experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2013). There may have been EPs in the team who had a lot of experience and knowledge related to this topic

therefore could have contributed more to the research via an interview process. However, I was unsure whether this was the case therefore wanted a few EPs to discuss the topic to help generate ideas and provide a range of psychological insights into SM use amongst young people.

Additionally, those that attend a focus group may not represent the larger population given their compliance to take part in a focus group (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2015). Those that attended the focus group appeared interested in the topic as they felt it is relevant to the EP profession. Those that did not agree to take part may not feel that SM use is relevant to the EP profession therefore the data from the focus group may not represent a larger population of EPs.

3.5.4.2.1 Role of the moderator

The interaction between the group members in a focus group is facilitated by a moderator. I was the moderator for this focus group. I was mindful not to dominate or control the discussion with the topic guide. A non-directive, passive approach was employed to encourage organic interactions and to allow the discussion to flow.

3.5.5 Data Analysis

I transcribed the interviews and the focus group and then analysed the data using TA. This study followed the guidelines outlined by Braun and Clarke (2013) below:

Stages of coding and analysis	
Stage 1	Transcribe the interviews and focus group.
Stage 2	Read and become familiar with the data.
Stage 3	Code across the entire data set.
Stage 4	Search for themes.
Stage 5	Review the themes and produce a thematic map.
Stage 6	Define and name the themes.
Stage 7	Write up the final themes.

Table 4: Stages of coding and analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p.202).

Stage 1: Transcribe the interviews and focus group.

I transcribed each interview and the focus group myself as Braun and Clarke (2006, p.18) suggest this “informs the early stages of analysis, and you will develop a far more thorough understanding of your data through having transcribed it”.

Stage 2: Read and become familiar with the data.

After I had transcribed my data, I printed out the transcripts and read over them whilst listening to the audio recording. I then read over each transcript again and made note of anything that interested me.

Stage 3: Code across the entire data set.

The next step was to code each interview transcript and the focus group transcript. I carried out complete coding as Braun and Clarke (2013) suggests this can enable the researcher to identify anything that is of interest and relevant to answering the research questions.

Interview data

I went through each interview transcript, line by line and coded everything that was of interest. This first attempt at coding the interview data resulted in a total of 600 codes. A large number of these codes did not make sense to me when separated from the data. I therefore proceeded to code each transcript again, making sure the codes provided me with enough information to reflect the data when separated from the transcripts. I chunked some of the data from the transcript into codes and gave similar data the same codes. This second attempt resulted in 157 codes. These were then entered as headings into a word document and the relevant extracts from the data were copied and pasted under each code. I have provided an example of my coding in Appendix D.

Focus Group data

For the focus group data, I coded the data in chunks and made sure each code made sense when separated from the transcript. This resulted in 56 codes. These were then entered as headings into a word document and the relevant extracts from the data were copy and pasted under each code. I have provided an example of my coding in Appendix E.

Stage 4: Search for themes.

The following description reflects the process I undertook to search for themes in both the interview and focus group data. Once I had decided upon the final codes for each data set, I wrote them onto post-its and displayed them on a large wall. I began to organise the codes into basic themes by grouping together codes which shared a similar meaning or characteristic. I then experimented with these themes and used one further method to create the basic themes; I put each theme into a text box in a word document with the relevant codes underneath.

Stage 5: Review the themes and produce a thematic map.

This stage of the data analysis process involved two levels; reviewing and refining my themes. The following description reflects the process I undertook to review the themes for both the interview and the focus group data. Firstly, I went back through each data extract under the various codes, to ensure the theme which the code related to, provided a coherent and meaningful interpretation of the data. If I felt that any data extracts did not “fit” with candidate themes, I proposed new themes or reworked current themes to accommodate the extracts. I then produced several thematic maps of candidate themes and sub-themes. The second stage in this process entailed reading through the data set as a whole to ensure the thematic map was a true representation of the meanings within the data. As a result of this second stage, I made a number of changes to my thematic maps. For example, I changed “keeping the peace within friendships” from a candidate theme into a sub-theme within the candidate theme “protective factors within SM use”. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest these two processes are important in order to check for internal and external homogeneity. By the end of this stage in the process, I had created several thematic maps which demonstrated a variety of candidate themes with and without sub-themes.

Stage 6: Define and name the themes.

In order to define and name the themes, I met with my supervisor to discuss my thematic maps. We also went through a section from an interview transcript and a section from the focus group transcript to see whether my supervisor may have

coded the data differently. As a result, he added a couple of extra codes, these are outlined in Appendix D and Appendix E.

After meeting with my supervisor, I reorganised the data further and re-named several candidate themes and sub-themes to avoid any ambiguity of what the theme title may entail. For example, I renamed the sub-theme “is that really you?” to “people can behave differently behind the screen”. An example of each thematic map has been provided for each theme throughout Chapter four.

Stage 7: Write up the final themes.

The final stage involved the write up of the final themes. In order to make sure the themes provided a coherent and meaningful interpretation of the data, I sent a first draft to a family member and a colleague. I then made further changes to ensure the sub-themes clearly related to the candidate themes and there was a balance between text and quotes. These themes are outlined in the next chapter.

3.6 Validity in qualitative research

The validity of research corresponds to the degree to which it is accepted as sound, legitimate and authoritative by people with an interest in research findings (Yardley, 2014, p.235).

Yardley (2014) suggests a different approach is needed when demonstrating the value and validity in qualitative research compared to quantitative research. This is due to the differences in the epistemological stances and the aims of qualitative and quantitative research.

This study focused on Yardley’s four core principles for judging the trustworthiness of qualitative research. These are outlined in the following sections.

1. *Sensitivity to Context*

This principle involves being sensitive to different contexts during the research process. This principle can be demonstrated at various stages throughout the study. I demonstrated sensitivity to context in this research study by:

- Carrying out a literature search prior to data collection to find a gap in the research on SM use amongst adolescent girls and its relevance to the EP profession.
- Adopting a constructivist ontology and interpretive epistemology, using TA to analyse data due to a lack of qualitative literature on this topic in the UK.
- Demonstrating sensitivity with the data collection, analysis and interpretation. For example, the interviews were conducted privately within the busy school setting and the focus group was conducted in a separate meeting room away from the busy LA office during half term. I also used quotes to support the statements made during analysis and interpretation.

2. *Commitment and Rigour*

Yardley (2014) mentions the thoroughness of a study as being one of the key principles of demonstrating validity in qualitative research. Commitment and rigour in this study were demonstrated by attempting to:

- Be attentive to the participants during the interview and focus group processes by following up on key points that were raised in their answers. I made sure each participant was comfortable and at ease.
- Be aware of the need to conduct a good interview (having carried out a pilot interview) and facilitate a good focus group by drawing upon skills from having carried out previous qualitative research.
- Bring a unique insight into the data collection and analysis of the interview transcripts having personally experienced the advantages and disadvantages of SM use.

3. *Coherence and Transparency*

A coherent piece of qualitative research must make sense as a whole document. It requires the researcher to establish a solid understanding in the chosen methods and their theoretical background in order to demonstrate clarity in their argument (Yardley, 2014). In order to demonstrate transparency, the researcher is required to demonstrate what was done and why. It is also important to show how the researcher may have influenced the study (Yardley, 2014).

I sought to demonstrate transparency and coherence in this research study by attempting to:

- Present a coherent account of the research process, results and implications for practice.
- Explain how the interview schedule for both the interviews and focus group were constructed and used during the research process.
- Discuss the steps used during the TA procedure and produce quotations within the data analysis.
- Present a reflexive account of the research process.

4. *Impact and Importance*

The last principle is impact and importance of the research. “There is no point in carrying out research unless the findings have the potential to make a difference” (Yardley, 2008 p.250). This principle was demonstrated by:

- Being explicit about the usefulness of the current study and the need for research in this area.
- Developing two models to help others understand SM use amongst young people.
- Suggesting considerations which could be made to relate a developmental framework to SM use amongst young people.
- Providing EPs with a set of questions they could use when working with a young person.
- Offering to present the findings to the LA and at an EP conference.

- Discussing the implications of the current study for young people, parents, school staff and EPs.
- Putting together an EP interest group for SM use amongst young people.

3.7 Ethical considerations

Ethics reflects “a set of moral principles and rules of conduct” (Morrow & Richards, 1996, p.90). Ethical practice within research is of the utmost importance as it aims to prevent harm to the participants (Dickson-Swift, James, & Liamputtong, 2008). It is specifically underpinned by the British Psychological Society's Code of Conduct (2018). Throughout this research, I have given due regard to this code. To be able to carry out this study, an application had to be submitted to the School for Policy Studies Research Ethics Committee at the University of Bristol. I was granted ethical approval by this committee in April 2017 after amendments were made as a result of a few queries from the committee.

Research carried out in schools can be faced with considerable ethical challenges (Felzmann, 2009). Key ethical considerations within this research will now be discussed.

3.7.1 Informed consent

It is essential for any participant within research to understand the reason for their involvement and what that entails. Within this research all participants were given information sheets to convey the detail of the study and asked to sign consent forms to provide consent to participate. For the interviews, due to the participants' ages (14-15) information sheets and consent forms were also provided for their parents and consent forms were signed and returned before the young person was interviewed. An example of these are provided in the Appendix (Appendix F to Appendix I). These documents and this process reflected an active consent process (Felzmann, 2009). It helped parents to make an informed decision as to whether their daughter could take part or not and also provided them with an opportunity to raise any questions about the research.

Each EP who agreed to take part in the focus group received an information sheet and consent form over email. Please see Appendix K and Appendix L for a copy of these. Consent forms were signed electronically and emailed back to me.

On meeting the students and the EPs, I thanked them for signing up for the study, checked their understanding of the research and that they were happy to take part.

3.7.2 Confidentiality

Confidentiality is also a necessity within research so that participants cannot be identified, if they do not wish to be. All participants were reminded that their participation in the study was voluntary and the discussion would remain confidential unless something was raised which I felt may be of harm to the participant or somebody else. This was also outlined in the consent forms as Felzmann (2009) suggests all relevant stakeholders must be made aware of the actions that will be taken if somebody is at risk of harm. Concerns related to safeguarding were passed onto the SENCo.

During the research process, I was mindful not to name or describe the setting, young people or EPs involved when discussing the research with colleagues, friends or family to ensure their anonymity. During the transcription phase, names of places and people were omitted. For the presentation of the findings in Chapter four, each participant has been given a pseudonym.

3.7.3 Preventing harm to participants

During the research, there was a risk that the students may have become distressed when talking about their experiences on SM especially if their experience had been negative. Interviews would have been stopped should this have happened, and participants would have been signposted to appropriate support services. They may also have been anxious about meeting with me to carry out this research therefore I spoke in assembly before choosing participants to introduce myself and explain the study.

3.8 Summary

The aim of this small-scale qualitative study was to provide an insight into the reported experience of using SM amongst adolescent girls and explore the experiences and knowledge of this topic amongst EPs.

Eight interviews were carried out with girls from Year ten at a rural secondary school. A focus group with six EPs was carried out in a local authority. A thematic analysis was carried out on both sets of data. The research process reflects my ontological and epistemological stance.

In Chapter four, the findings from the data analysis for the interview data will be presented and discussed, followed by the findings from the focus group data analysis.

Chapter 4: Presentation of findings

4.1 Introduction

In the first half of this chapter, I will present the findings from the thematic analysis of the data for the interviews with the eight adolescent girls. The data will be presented in six overarching themes which will be split into sub-themes. I will describe each overarching theme to provide the reader with an understanding of the “central organising concept” (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p.224) which it represents. Specific sub-themes will then be discussed and quotes from the participants will be used to illustrate the points that will be made. Each participant has been given a pseudo name in order to anonymise the quotes

The following research questions guided the data analysis;

1. What are the reported experiences of SM use by adolescent girls?
2. What are the advantages of using SM as perceived by adolescent girls?
3. What are the disadvantages of using SM as perceived by adolescent girls?
4. How do adolescent girls manage the disadvantages of SM?

The six overarching themes, identified from the thematic analysis of the interview data, are as follows;

Theme 1: SM use varied amongst the girls.

Theme 2: SM plays a positive and negative role in relationships

Theme 3: Problems occur on SM due to a lack of boundaries, a lack of consequences for behaviour and increased anonymity.

Theme 4: Growing up and living with SM as an adolescent.

Theme 5: Too much of a good thing.

Theme 6: Protective factors within SM use.

4.1.1 **Theme one: SM use varied amongst the girls.**

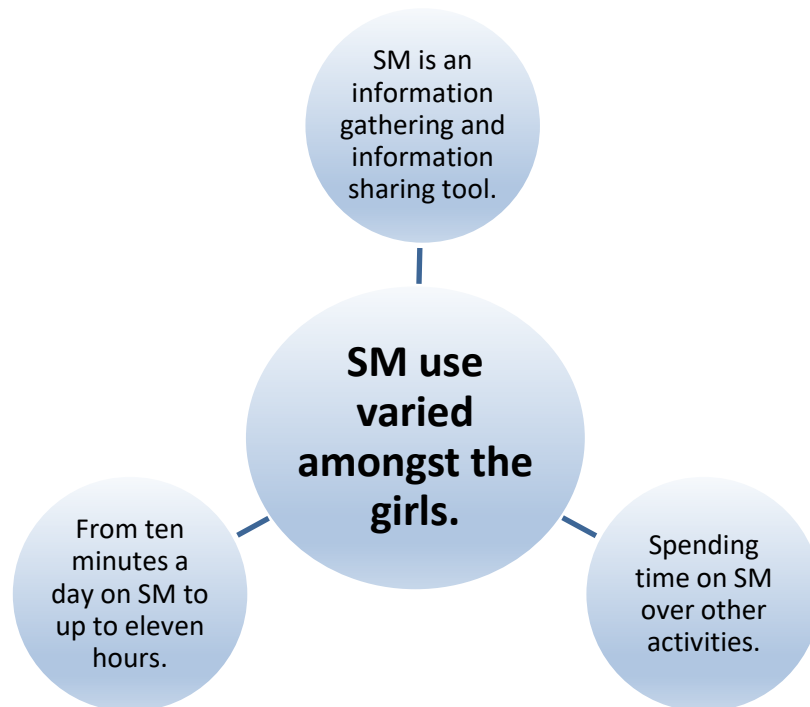


Figure 4: Theme one: SM use varied amongst the girls.

Each girl I interviewed described having SM and explained that they use it every day to chat with their friends. However the duration, the specific purpose and when they used it, differed amongst individuals' descriptions. Going on SM was often the preferred activity for some of the girls to do in their free time as long as Wifi was available. Snapchat was reported to be the most popular and widely used SM. The girls also reported accessing Instagram, Facebook and YouTube. The following sub themes reflect their perceptions and reported experiences of using SM in more detail.

4.1.1 i **Sub theme: From ten minutes a day on SM to up to eleven hours.**

All of the girls explained that they accessed SM on their smart phones, as and when they got messages from their friends. Libby described only going on SM for '10 minutes' as she explained 'I have lots of homework to do now'. However, other girls described spending additional time (on top of communicating with their friends) on SM posting photographs, tagging friends in comments of posts, observing others'

posts, watching videos, scrolling through their feeds, watching videos on YouTube and films on Netflix. Amy described using different SM apps for varying amounts of time. Her description suggested she can be on SM for up to eleven hours a day;

Amy: Instagram probably about six hours. [...]

Facebook is only a couple of hours. [...]

YouTube maybe 2 to 3 hours. I am on SM a lot
yeah!

Summer and Amy explained that they go on SM at school during break and lunch time whilst all the girls described going on SM at home. Some of them expressed using two SMs at once and others outlined how they go on SM as soon as they wake up in the morning. Mia (who explained that she goes on SM for at least six hours a day) said 'you could class it as my hobby, because it's so **easy** to use and it's quite nice just knowing everything that is going on'.

4.1.1 ii **Sub theme: SM is an information gathering and information sharing tool.**

Some girls appeared to enjoy the way in which SM provided them with access to a variety of information. For example, they described how SM had helped with homework and gaining work experience. Chloe described finding out about nice places to visit and restaurants to eat at because of what others put on their Snapchat stories. Poppy explained how she finds out about popular shows on Netflix as they are often discussed on SM amongst friends. Furthermore, she described how SM can be used to reach lots of people if somebody wanted to raise awareness;

Poppy: Like trying to raise awareness about something and you want a lot of people to see it then SM is always a good way to do it.

4.1.1 iii **Sub theme: Spending time on SM over other activities**

For some girls, their stories of using SM suggested that going on SM during their free time appeared to take preference over other activities such as reading, taking up hobbies and talking to people. Their descriptions of using SM suggested that it provided them with a continuous source of entertainment therefore they rarely felt bored.

Chloe: I quite enjoy reading but I don't, obviously, because SM is there I don't really think *oh I'll read a book* anymore because I've got that SM, I am not bored.

Summer and Poppy described being on SM in their free time when they were all together with their friends. Instead of talking to each other face to face, Summer described how they all go on their phones once they have eaten their lunch in the canteen. She also explained that her SM use can impact upon her relationship with her family as she is constantly on her phone.

For some of the girls, the only time they eluded to not being on SM was when they were doing their homework or when Wifi was not available (for example, when they were on holiday). For other girls, they described going on SM *instead* of doing their homework. They described finding it difficult to resist the temptation to check their SM as they could hear their phone going off or see messages coming through. Subsequently this meant it took them longer to do their homework and at times it never got done.

Researcher: Does it ever impact upon your schoolwork?

Leah: Yeah because you sort of get a bit distracted sometimes, sometimes when you start trying to work on school stuff and then SM will distract you, it sort of slows it all down. Sometimes the stuff doesn't end up being done.

4.1.2 **Theme two: SM plays a positive and negative role in relationships.**

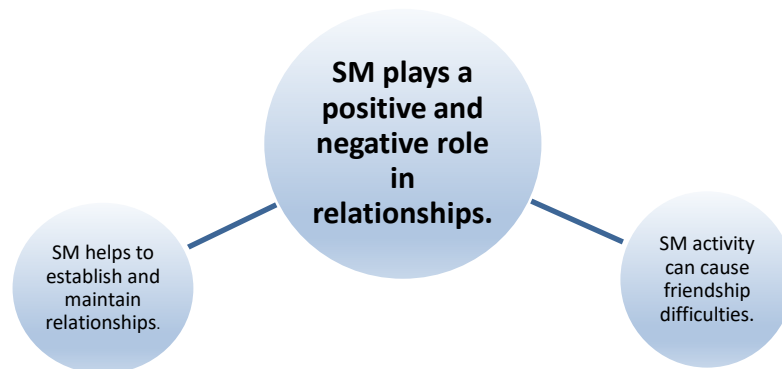


Figure 5: Theme two: SM plays a positive and negative role in relationships.

The girls' stories of using SM suggested that relationships with others (friends and family) were important to them and talking over SM with their friends appeared to make them feel better if they were feeling low. They described how their SM use, in particular messaging others, enabled them to establish new friendships as well as maintain current friendships and relationships with family members. However, the girls explained how they often experienced conflict and fell out with their friends due to both active and passive behaviour on SM. At times, SM did not appear to help to maintain relationships but instead led to conflict and sometimes worsened the difficulties the girls experienced as a result of using SM.

4.1.2 i **Sub theme: SM helps to establish and maintain relationships.**

The girls reported how SM enabled them to connect with other people and establish new friendships. Summer described a new friendship that had formed as a result of a peer 'spamming' her on Instagram (liking her photos). She explained how she reciprocated the likes and they then became friends on Snapchat and they now chat every day. Similarly, Mia described how she has 'got a few friends in America [...] we have never met but we are quite fond online'.

The girls described how SM can connect people together and break down geographical barriers. They could see the value in being able to talk to friends and family over SM who did not live nearby;

Researcher: Can you think of a time when you feel somebody should definitely use SM?

Chloe: Probably when you've got to stay in touch with families who live far away [...] I use Facebook messenger to message some of my family who live in Spain, it's a good idea.

All the girls described using SM to maintain their current friendships. They did not report SM stopping them from meeting up with each other but instead SM provided a tool to facilitate meeting up. For Chloe, a 'real' friendship now included 'meeting up all the time, talking face to face...' therefore her descriptions of using SM reflected a role in maintaining her relationships (she explained how she had previously spoken to a lot of strangers on SM but soon realised it was dangerous and blocked them all). The girls explained how they enjoyed taking funny photos of their faces and sending them to each other as well as seeing jokes and funny things on SM which then became inside jokes with friends.

They also described seeing personal posts on SM from their friends which suggested they were upset or going through a difficult time. They explained how they would then message their friends to make sure they were OK;

Summer: On Snapchat people put on their stories that if they are upset and usually one of my mates puts it so I know she is OK and I will message – *Are you OK? Do you need cheering up?*

However, Summer went onto explain it may make her friend feel worse if they knew other people were worrying about them. Depending on what their friends had posted, a careful balance had to be struck between checking in with friends and leaving them alone.

4.1.2 ii **Sub theme: SM activity can cause friendship difficulties.**

The girls and their peers explained that they regularly experience friendship difficulties and SM often played a role in this. For example, Mia described how her friends sometimes message her on SM to include her in arguments even if she has not previously been a part of the conflict. She also described how her and her friends fall out if somebody has seen something on SM which they don't like;

Mia: [...] you could definitely say arguments with friends happen over SM quite a bit. Because they'll see something, get upset by it and you're like *well it's just something I've posted*. And because it's happened online it's hard to speak to them about it in person so it does definitely affect things with friends.

Some girls described seeing posts on SM which showed their friends meeting up without them. They explained that this would sometimes cause conflict as girls felt left out of the friendship group they thought they were a part of.

The girls' stories suggested that ineffective and unhelpful communication over SM was sometimes the cause of friendship difficulties. All but one girl described how communication over SM had played a role in causing conflict between them and their friends. From the girls' descriptions, it appeared to be difficult for the girls to communicate effectively through a screen, over SM, when using text based messages. This frustrated Chloe as she explained 'what I am saying through text isn't what I want to say in person'. Poppy described how she had experienced an unhelpful, passive form of communication when she experienced conflict in her friendship;

Poppy: I had a fall out with one of my mates once and they put something on Instagram, it was like a quote thing and I knew that was aimed at me because we had just had that fall out.

The girls reported that when young people experience friendship difficulties, they tend to share these on SM, in particular on their Snapchat stories (this is a compilation of snaps that the user has posted over the past 24 hours). Chloe explained how this can be unhelpful as 'people don't understand the full story, they just get what you put down not the reason behind it'. Poppy described how friendship difficulties can be shared to lots of people and how this has made her feel;

Poppy: [...] it [an argument that has been posted on SM] goes from story to story to story and everyone will start sharing it and literally it'll be gone to everyone. And then you kind of feel like *well that's everyone against me...*

4.1.3 Theme three: Problems occur on SM due to a lack of boundaries, a lack of consequences for behaviour and increased anonymity.

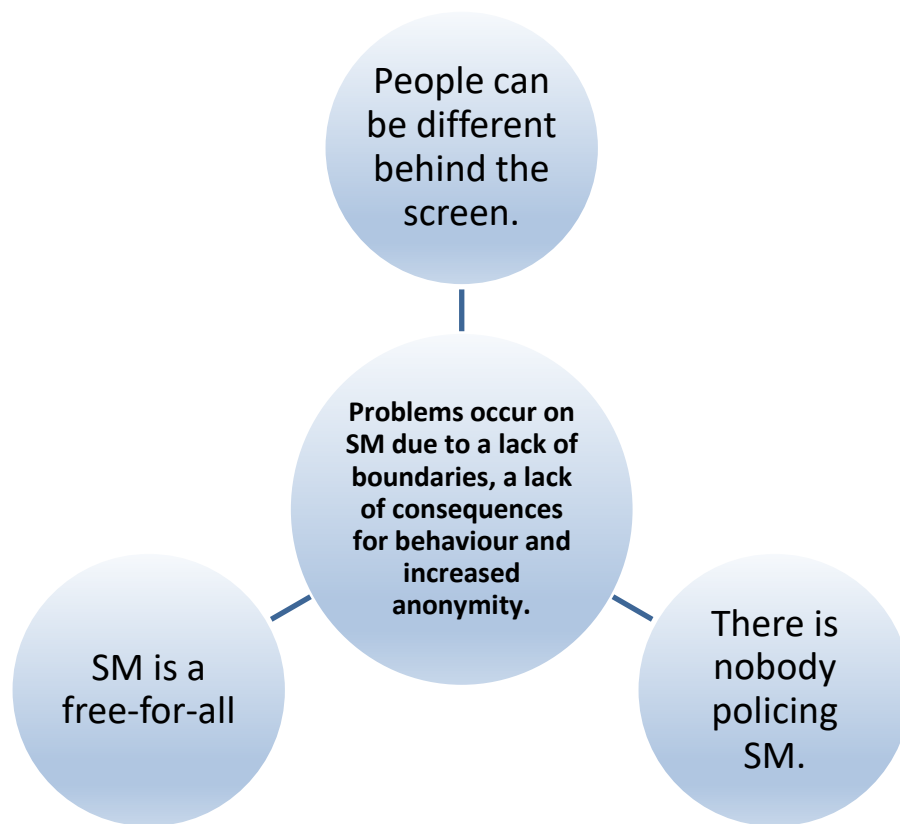


Figure 6: Theme three: Problems occur on SM due to a lack of boundaries, a lack of consequences for behaviour and increased anonymity.

All the girls described problems they had encountered as a result of using SM and suggested ways in which things could be different, to prevent these problems happening again. The problems varied in severity but appeared to occur as a result of either a lack of boundaries, a lack of consequences for behaviour or increased anonymity. They reflected on this in more detail which is provided in the sub themes below.

4.1.3 i Sub theme: SM is a free-for-all

Anybody can get SM at any time, which can lead to a range of problems. Mia described how ‘other people make fake accounts so they can just post hate towards people they aren’t fond of’. She also described how she has experienced older

people try to message her despite her setting her profiles on SM to private. The girls suggested there should be more boundaries and rules around who can have SM and what is posted on SM in order to reduce the negativity online and protect SM users. This was particularly prevalent when the girls discussed younger children accessing SM and the associated risks that came with this;

Poppy: A lot of young children it will be a really exciting thing for them and I feel like they will just accept everyone. They'll be like *oh look I am getting loads of followers* but it could be loads of random people that they don't know. And things that are a lot more inappropriate, kids are getting shown, which isn't right for them at such a young age.

The availability of the smart phone appeared to lead to younger children getting SM which the girls did not agree with. Poppy described a future generation where it would be the 'norm' to have a phone from a very young age and explained that this should not happen and 'they should be careful about what ages there is'.

4.1.3 ii **Sub theme: There is nobody policing SM.**

The lack of control over how other people use SM and the lack of consequences for behaviour on SM appeared to be a significant disadvantage of SM for the girls. Poppy described how it is other people who make SM an unsafe place to be. Abigail described how the original aim of SM was positive but as it has developed it has 'become somewhere for [...] people to hate on other people'. Poppy described, in detail, an incident that happened at her school where a video went around on SM which showed 'a kid beating up a younger kid'. Due to nobody stopping this video from being posted or shared, it reached and upset a lot of young people as it was shared across SM.

Similarly, due to nobody checking content on SM, Mia described how posts are not always real on SM and explained that 'some stuff is unrealistic'. She also described

feeling upset after seeing posts related to the Manchester attacks and seeing suicide pages on Instagram.

People who access SM on their smart phones are able to screen shot material on SM and send this picture to other SM users. The girls described losing ownership over their posts when they had shared personal feelings. This appeared to make them vulnerable to possible cyber bullying;

Summer: [...] I, at one point I put *I just want space, everyone leave me alone* on my Snapchat story before and everyone was screen-shotting it saying *she is going to do this, she is going to do that, she is depressed.*

4.1.3 iii **Sub theme: People can behave differently behind the screen.**

The girls described how users can pretend to be somebody they are not behind the screen on SM. Knowing this was 'really scary' for Mia. They explained how people often feel more confident behind the screen as you don't have to see someone's live reaction to what you are posting. This made it easier for them to be nasty to others;

Abigail: I think it is easier I guess to hide behind [SM], and just type something where as saying it to someone's face where you have their live reaction, I guess it is a lot harder to say that.

Mia applied the analogy of a wall whilst describing the negatives of SM as 'it's like a wall from everything, so people just feel as if they can just say anything...'. As a result of other people feeling more confident online, Mia described how nasty behaviours followed her home and increased in intensity;

Mia: [...] when I was in Year 7, I faced a lot of hate online. [...] people were saying stuff at school but when it got home, they were saying so much **more** online. Because I felt like they didn't have as much confidence in person than they did online.

4.1.4 **Theme four: Growing up and living with SM as an adolescent**

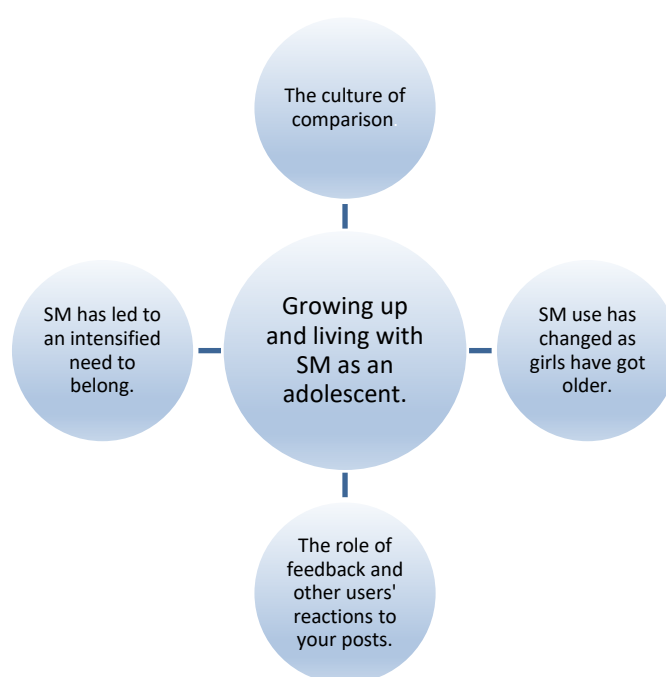


Figure 7: Theme four: Growing up and living with SM as an adolescent.

The girls have grown up and now live in a world where all adolescents appear to use SM. This seems to have intensified image management and the need to belong. They described growing up with SM and reflected upon how their use of it has changed as they have got older. They described how they have learnt from past mistakes on SM as a result of having negative experiences on the apps. SM had become such an essential and normal part of their lives that some could not imagine life without it. For some of the girls, their SM use reflected an intensified need to belong as everybody had SM and used it every day. As a result of growing up and living with SM, the girls seem to be experiencing an intense culture of comparison. They also appeared hyper aware to positive and negative feedback due to passive and active use of SM; it played a large role in establishing their identity.

4.1.4 i **Sub theme: SM use has changed as girls have got older**

Some of the girls described how their experiences of how they used SM, what SM they used and for how long, had changed over the years. Facebook appeared to have been used more when the girls were younger with Snapchat and Instagram being used more now the girls were 15 years old. For Chloe, she described how exciting it was to get SM when she was younger. She explained that she felt like she had earned it and eluded to spending a lot of time on it;

Chloe: I became obsessed with talking to my friends on Facebook and just playing games on Facebook and I never used to just go out.

In contrast, Poppy described not having SM when she was younger as she wanted to live her 'child life as much as possible before SM came around'. As Chloe has got older she has reflected on how young people below the age of 13 should not get SM as it just 'ruins your childhood'. She went on to describe how she soon got bored with SM and now prefers to 'sit there and chill' when she gets home. In addition, she realised she was not getting the grades she wanted in her school work, due to spending too much time on SM therefore explained how her priorities had changed from spending time on SM to doing homework. Chloe stated that 'as you get older you find it so much easier just to push it away and ignore SM.'

Some girls described how they used to post more on SM compared to now. This appeared to be due to a variety of reasons such as not wanting to repeat a previous negative experience, losing interest and forgetting to post on SM and wanting to be more private. In addition, some girls described being less interested in the amount of likes or followers they received as they had matured from when they first got SM. For Abigail, the attitude amongst her peers and from bigger SM stars appeared to influence her attitude;

Abigail: And with likes, I don't really care anymore, I think I have matured in that kind of way.

Researcher: Why do you think you have matured?

Abigail: I think I have met more people or seen more people who have kind of have that view and I guess it has changed my opinion and I think *oh yeh that is a better view to have*, that is probably why.

Abigail described how she deleted all her pictures she had posted on Instagram and now does not think 'anyone needs to definitely use it [SM] unless you really want to I don't think.'

However, Summer's experience depicted an increase in the enjoyment of getting more likes and positive comments. She described how she does not post as much but still posts one picture every day on Instagram with a different caption and a different filter. Her posts get a lot more likes now, for example she explained how the total of likes has increased from 30 to over 100. Her narrative around her SM use suggests she enjoys the comments from people she has lost touch with as they will comment 'you have changed so much, you are so much prettier'.

4.1.4 ii **Sub theme: SM has led to an intensified need to belong.**

Not having SM appeared to make individuals feel upset and different from their peers. Amy explained how some young people think 'you're not cool if you don't post, you're not cool if you are not active'. Poppy described her experience of not being allowed Snapchat until her most recent birthday;

Poppy: [...] if your closest friends are doing something that you're not allowed to do [...] it kind of makes you feel *oh err*, quite a normal thing and they are being allowed to do it and you can't, it kind of makes you feel upset.

Parental restrictions on when Poppy could access SM appeared to result in missing out on group chats as these sometimes occurred late at night when she was in bed. She described how this made her feel different from her peers as she was unable to keep up with what was being discussed in the moment but instead had to catch up on the messages in the morning.

A specific feature on Snapchat called 'streaks' was a popular activity that was discussed by the girls. This feature measured how often they messaged each other (after messaging for three consecutive days) and gave the users a number next to their name. Girls explained that they would often just message 'streaks' first thing in the morning, in these conversations, to increase their numbers with particular friends. Some described comparing their number of streaks between friends. This feature appeared to highlight the closeness of girls between their friends as well as provide an element of competition within a friendship group. Some girls' descriptions of their SM use reflected a sense of pressure to keep up with the messages between friends in order to feel a sense of belonging within their friendship group;

Researcher: Do you ever feel pressure to respond to your friends online straightaway?

Amy: What like messages? Yeah. You don't want them to forget about you and get bored...message someone else, yeah, respond as quickly as you can.

Some girls appeared to be heavily reliant on SM to keep up with their peers. Summer's description of her phone suggested it played a large role in feeling the need to be connected at all times;

Summer: [...] I can't live without my phone. My phone is everywhere even if I just go downstairs to make a drink it is in my back pocket, I can't go anywhere without my phone. [...] I am scared if someone is going to message me something or I am going to miss out somebody calling me. I am just really attached to it.

4.1.4 iii **Sub theme: The culture of comparison.**

The girls described partaking in passive activity on SM which included looking at other peoples' posts, Snapchat stories, Youtube channels and watching Netflix. They explained how they follow famous people and Poppy felt it was nice that famous people can share their life with others through SM. However, the girls appeared to partake in a culture of comparison during and as a result of this activity. On the whole, this behaviour seemed to occur sub-consciously. The girls described comparing the way they look, the comments on posts and the amount of likes on posts to others on SM. This comparative behaviour appeared to be quite specific;

Amy: [...] you are comparing yourself [...] she may have got perfect and I might have got a comment of pretty. *Why aren't I perfect? Why am I only pretty...?*

At times the girls described feeling sad as a result of comparing themselves. Amy described how she has accepted this as 'Everyone's gonna feel sad at one point.' Mia described the posts as 'threatening' as 'it definitely lays out what we're expected to be like'. The narrative appeared to be negative around comparative behaviours;

Amy: You do compare a lot. I feel like a lot of this generation compares a lot, compares themselves to each other. I can only speak for myself but I don't know many people who are confident because of SM. Mainly Instagram I would say is a big killer for confidence.

Mia explained how a young person should not use SM if they are struggling with their body image due to the unhelpful culture of comparison. Amy described how, as a result of passive use on SM, she has ‘absorbed that *I have to be perfect...* I don’t want to admit it but I want to look good, I care about how I look.’

4.1.4 iv **Sub theme: The role of feedback and other users’ reactions to your posts**

The girls described thinking carefully about what they posted on SM. Their descriptions of how they use SM suggested they wanted to present an identity which others liked and approved of;

Researcher: So, how do you decide what to post? And when and to whom?

Summer: Well, it takes a while really. I will take a picture and if I don't like it, I will take the picture with the same filter until I like it and then if I like it, I will usually save it onto my camera and then if I want to put it on, it will take a while to decide, *do I post it as my new Instagram page or not...*

Girls who posted often on SM explained that they enjoy getting the positive feedback on their pictures and described how it made them feel good about themselves (positive feedback included likes and comments). It appeared more important to get likes on Instagram compared to Facebook, suggesting Facebook is for an older generation.

Feedback on other people’s posts also seemed to play a role in determining behaviour and the girls were hyper aware of this. For example, Mia described how she would not post something on her profile if she had observed it getting negative feedback on somebody else’s profile. Similarly, Amy described how she has observed which photos get the most likes on Instagram (these were mainly selfies as

they 'are more desirable'). She explained how she would not post a photo similar to one which did not receive many likes. Amy stated that it was mainly boys who provided the likes as they were more passive in their SM activity compared to the girls; 'the boys like more, they would just double tap if it's a good girl, pretty girl...'

However, it was not always about peer approval when posting on SM. Poppy described how it is important to think of how your posts may upset others;

Poppy: [...] You never know how that can affect someone else. You can put one thing on thinking you're upset about it but it can also upset someone else or another person and another person and soon it can make everyone else really upset.

4.1.5 Theme five: Too much of a good thing

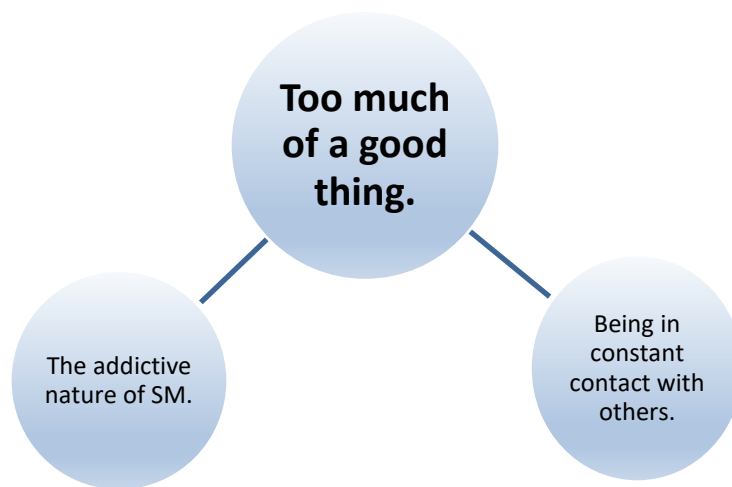


Figure 8: Theme five: Too much of a good thing

Although all the girls had SM and described how they use it every day (often commenting upon how easy it is to use), those that used it the most reflected upon how themselves and others sometimes use SM too much. They appeared to feel addicted to it at times, finding it difficult to put it down. Other girls explained that they welcomed a break from the constant messaging and enjoyed spending time with their families, away from SM.

4.1.5 i Sub theme: The addictive nature of SM.

Due to the way in which SM can provide young people with instant communication and entertainment at all hours of the day, those that used SM considerably more than others described finding it hard to put SM down. Chloe explained how she thinks some people use SM way too much and that they need to stop. Amy alluded to the addictive nature of SM as she explained how 'you can almost go like brain-dead because you're so on it, time flies by almost. You are missing out on things that might be happening outside your window but you wouldn't know because you are on Instagram'. She described how her usage of SM has become a bad habit as she cannot resist looking at SM;

Amy: I go to work for two hours after school and I have to not look at it [SM]-and I find myself doing it -*no you're at work, you're at work* I think this is a bad habit, I need to stop it...

4.1.5 ii Sub theme: Being in constant contact with others.

Although all girls described using SM during their free time, some girls described enjoying a break from SM, especially the constant messaging between friends. They explained how they spend a lot of time getting involved in others' lives and communicating with their friends, therefore spending less time on themselves;

Poppy: I wouldn't want to lose it [SM] forever but sometimes having a break from it would be good for you because you can take yourself completely away from everyone else's lives and focus on what you're doing.

Chloe: I quite like it [time off SM]. Just having the time off SM and usually on Sundays I'll go out with my family and it's just a break from the constant people messaging you and stuff.

4.1.6 Theme six: Protective factors within SM use

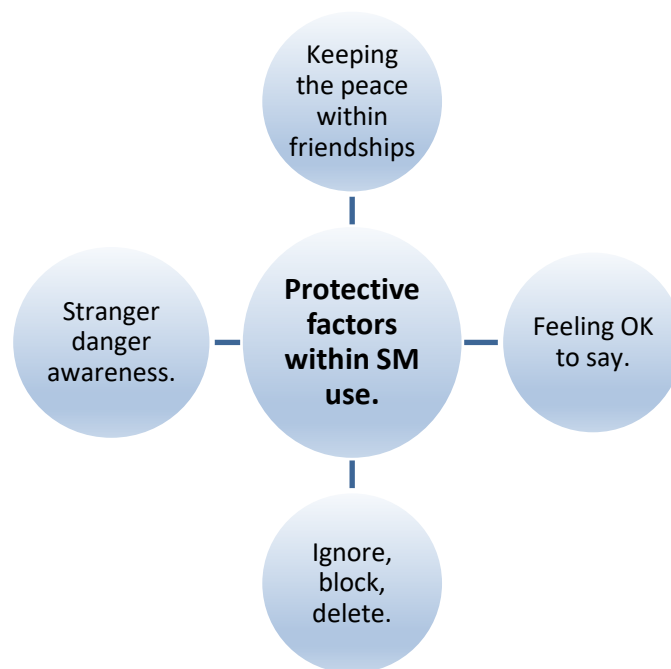


Figure 9: Theme six: Protective factors within SM use.

The girls described partaking in several behaviours which acted as protective factors to ensure SM played a positive role in their lives. Positive relationships with adults and peers were important to all the girls. These relationships provided them with support when they faced challenges on SM or had a negative experience on SM. When conflict arose within their friendships as a result of using SM, they explained how they managed it in different ways in order to continue to have a good time on SM and maintain their relationships. The school usually helped them with setting their privacy settings and then day to day, they managed the risks both independently and with their friends.

They described being aware of stranger danger. Their actions reflected a sense of permanency when getting rid of things which may cause them to have a negative experience. A negative experience included seeing girls with the ideal body image, receiving negative feedback on posts, receiving a friend request from a stranger and observing other users being nasty to each other on SM. The following sub themes detail the protective factors which enabled them to enjoy SM.

4.1.6 i **Sub theme: Feeling OK to say**

The girls described talking to their friends and family about feeling sad from spending time on SM. Mia explained how she has learnt that it is good to talk about her feelings as she had friends who had not spoken about their feelings and as a result, were self harming. They appeared to know who they could talk to (including teachers) and were aware that speaking about one's feelings can be an effective way to manage uncomfortable emotions;

Researcher: How do you manage feeling sad when you see things like that?

Mia: I sometimes just message my friends about it and see how they are feeling and I even sometimes speak to my parents about what I have seen and let them know what is going on and stuff. Because talking and being open about it, not keeping it all cooped up, is quite good.

Chloe described how speaking to her mother helped to sort out the incident when she commented something nasty on a friend's photo and somebody else took a photo of the comment and sent it around their peer group. Similarly, Amy described how she talks to her father about the comparison culture and the role SM has played in her attitude to feeling she needs to look perfect.

4.1.6 ii **Sub theme: Keeping the peace within friendships**

All the girls described experiencing friendship difficulties due to using SM. In amongst the girls' descriptions of their SM use, conflict in friendships was managed in different ways; talking over SM, talking on the phone, talking face to face, ignoring each other and having one good friend in the group to resolve conflict. For example, Mia described how she and her friends find it easier to resolve conflict over SM because 'we are quite cooped up and not as outspoken as most people, we just find it easier to speak [...] online with messages'. Whereas Chloe explained that she would try to meet up with a friend or speak to them on the phone if they have an argument as 'I

feel like on the phone it's more real'. In general, the girls explained that talking face to face can be a more effective way of communicating and resolving conflict compared to talking over SM or posting friendship difficulties on your SM.

Researcher: Can you think of a time when you feel someone should definitely **not** use it?

Poppy: I feel definitely when you've had an argument with someone or you've fallen out with someone, don't put stuff all over SM because in a way that hurts more than someone coming up to your face because you kind of know you can't really do much about it.

Girls appeared to find strength in specific relationships to help solve friendship difficulties. For example, Poppy described how she has struggled with friendships in the past but now she has one good friend in her group who helps the others to include her when they make plans without her. In contrast, Libby explained that she does not lean on others to help her keep the peace within her friendship group. Instead, she described leaving the group chat on SM if her friends were arguing. She appeared to be disinterested in the drama and explained that she found it annoying when her phone kept going off in the evenings as she just wanted to relax with her family.

Managing conflict, which had resulted from SM use, enabled the girls to continue to have a positive experience on SM and maintain their friendships.

4.1.6 iii **Sub theme: Ignore, block, delete.**

The girls described managing the disadvantages of SM in a variety of ways; from a nonchalant attitude to temporarily deleting SM. When the girls saw posts they did not like, they explained how they try to ignore them by swiping past the posts and not lingering on them. Mia simply put 'try and just make sure you don't sit there and stare...'.

They described often blocking users when they no longer wanted them to have access to their profiles. Furthermore, the girls explained how they have deleted various aspects of SM from posts and comments to their entire SM account. Mia described how her friends who receive negative feedback on selfies 'just delete the comment and block the person'. She further explained how she has deleted her SM quite a few times 'because it just got so much hate'.

The girls reflected upon how SM could be improved to facilitate a positive experience. Although the girls seemed to take advantage of deleting unwanted posts from others, Poppy described how she would like to stop this opportunity as once something is deleted there is no proof that it was ever on SM;

Poppy: I would like to change how you can say something to someone and then completely hide it and no-one will ever find out about it. [...]
So, if someone sends you something that upsets you, you can't really show anyone because it's gone.

4.1.6 iv **Sub theme: Stranger danger awareness**

All girls described having their profiles on SM set to private although Chloe was unsure of what exact privacy settings she had as her mother had set them up for her. The girls appeared to understand the risk of SM users pretending to be somebody they are not. Libby described rarely posting stories on her Snapchat as she finds it 'scary' that strangers can see them.

Most of the girls described not being friends with strangers on SM, however the concept of stranger differed between the girls. For example, Poppy explained that she is not friends with strangers on SM but she has people on her SM who her friends may know;

Poppy: But if they are virtually friends and if my friends have spoken about them in school *this is so and so* then I'd obviously have them on Instagram...

The girls explained how they sometimes work together to keep each other safe from strangers. For example, Summer described how recently her and her friends checked if anybody knew a guy who had sent her friend a friend request before she agreed to accept it or not;

Summer: [...] I was like *I don't know him* and she asked all of our friends and everyone said *no* so she just declined it straightaway, she didn't message him back.

4.2 Summary

This half of the chapter presented the findings from the data analysis that was undertaken on the interviews with the adolescent girls. It explored the six overarching themes within the data set which were then broken down into further sub-themes. These sub themes were then discussed in detail and quotes from the transcripts were used to illustrate the points that were made.

I will now present the findings from the EP focus group.

4.3 Introduction

In the second half of this chapter, I will present the findings from the thematic analysis of the data for the focus group with the six EPs. The data will be presented in three overarching themes which will be split into sub-themes. I will describe each overarching theme to provide the reader with an understanding of the 'central organising concept' (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p.224) which it represents. Specific sub-themes will then be discussed and quotes from the participants will be used to illustrate the points that will be made. Each participant has been given a pseudo name in order to anonymise the quotes.

The following research questions guided the data analysis;

1. Why may adolescent girls behave as they do on SM?
2. What may be the potential impact of SM use on adolescent girls?
3. How can the EP profession support young people, families and school staff to safely navigate SM?

The three overarching themes identified from the analysis of the focus group data are as follows;

Theme 1: Adolescence is a unique developmental period.

Theme 2: SM use has divided the generations.

Theme 3: The potential impact of SM use on mental wellbeing.

Theme 4: EPs have a lot to offer to support young people and their SM use.

4.3.1 **Theme one: Adolescence is a unique developmental period.**

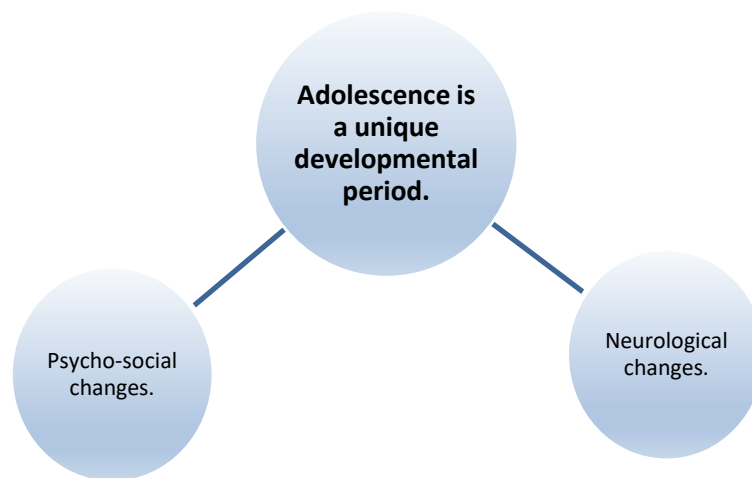


Figure 10: Theme one: Adolescence is a unique developmental period.

The EPs suggested that the changes that occur during adolescence could provide possible reasons as to why adolescent girls use SM the way they do. These changes included changes to their brain and identity, with a stronger need to belong.

4.3.1 i **Sub theme: Neurological changes**

The EPs described the neurological changes that young people go through during adolescence and suggested ways in which these changes may influence their behaviour on SM. Yvonne described how changes to the adolescent brain may lead to risky behaviour on SM given the limited boundaries some young people experience;

Yvonne: [...] there's that period of synaptic pruning, when you make poor choices, when you go into that adolescent brain and you become like a toddler but then we want to give you more privacy and more freedom but your decision making is poor!

Yvonne further explained that young people may find it difficult to contemplate how their present behaviour on SM may impact upon them in the future, especially in relation to permanent posts online;

Yvonne: It kind of stretches their mind to think about when you apply for a job or apply to a college... that [activity on SM] is going to follow you.

4.3.1 ii **Sub theme: Psycho-social changes**

The EPs also discussed a number of psycho-social changes which adolescents go through during this developmental stage. Sophia suggested that SM use could play a role in forming a young person's identity as it is a 'way of exploring and communicating who you are and what's important to you'. Jessica described how young people can choose what they want to share and can therefore depict their ideal identity as 'on SM, things are thought through, you're thinking about what version of myself shall I put out there?'

Adolescents can feel a strong need to belong during this developmental period and SM can provide them with a communicative tool to keep up with their peers. Yvonne described how 'it's kind of become normalised' to use SM as adolescent girls and their friends all use it to keep in touch. Due to this normalisation of having SM, the EPs explained how young people may look different from their peers if they do not have SM;

Aaron: Do you think if they don't have SM they might be picked on for that?

Sophia: I suppose they'll look different.

Yvonne: They might feel left ... it may not necessarily mean they are being picked on...

Abigail: But not included.

Yvonne: Yeh

Another way in which the EPs suggested SM could facilitate a need to belong was through making friends online. Sophia suggested ‘it’s more likely that you would find your people online’ therefore girls may establish new relationships with peers on SM. Jessica described how for some young people, they have never met their friends face to face as their friendship is entirely online, on SM.

4.3.2 **Theme two: SM use has divided the generations**

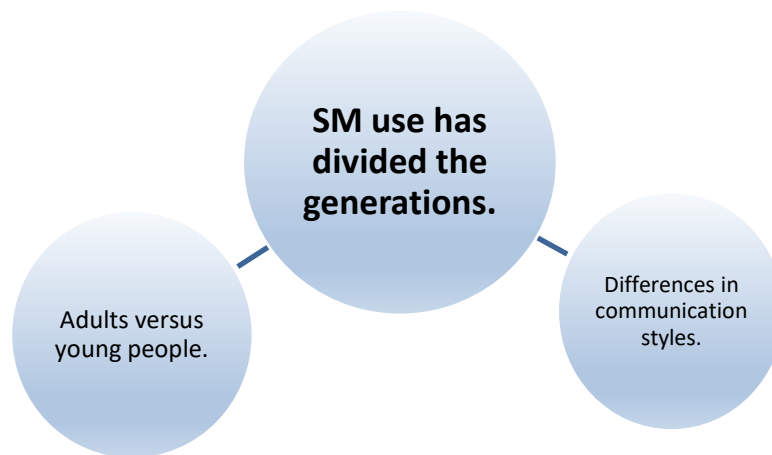


Figure 11: Theme two: SM use has divided the generations

The EPs described how SM use has divided generations and has made young people feel different from their parents or older adults in society. Specifically, this division has been observed amongst EPs from a safety perspective (some parents do not understand what their adolescent children are doing online and who they are talking to) and a career perspective (young people can make a career out of SM). Overall, the EPs’ descriptions depicted a sense of ‘us versus them’ when discussing this generational divide and the differences in communication styles appeared to be the most common and significant difference between the generations.

4.3.2 i **Sub theme: Adults versus young people**

Jessica described how ‘adults just seem to intrinsically hate what young people love’ making the generations feel different from each other. Kate described how adults can project their understanding of a situation onto a young person, resulting in mis-communication;

Kate: For me the times I have been involved, it has always been the adult [...] it has always been the adult concern and not necessarily the child's concern. So, a lot of that stuff about how they define friendships has come out for me from a lot of work. For adults, they are not **real** friends, they can't possibly be real friends online, he doesn't have real friends...

Jessica described adults looking down on young people and their behaviour as 'societal gaze' as 'SM is seen as a young person thing to do and it's almost like adults are making a construction of what youth is, based on what young people are posting and liking and doing on SM.' She wondered whether the claims related to the negative impact of SM are justified or whether 'actually [...] it's about the older generation almost [...] making it bad.'

4.3.2 ii **Sub Theme: Differences in communication styles**

The EPs described how young people appear to be communicating in a different way now that SM is widely available. This appears to set them apart from other generations. An advantage of this, as suggested by Sophia, is that young people may have different, valuable communication skills, now that a lot of their communication is online, over SM. Sophia described how young people with communication difficulties can experience a sense of belonging over connecting with others on SM, despite the adults not believing this to be the case.

However, the EPs described how young people may also be communicating over SM in risky ways within romantic relationships. A behaviour which the EPs suggested has become normalised and sets them apart from other generations;

Yvonne: If it's normal for boys and girls in relationships in adolescence to send intimate photos of themselves, then that's what you do because that's what you do in a relationship and the message that your peer group give you...

4.3.3 **Theme three: The potential impact of SM use on mental wellbeing**

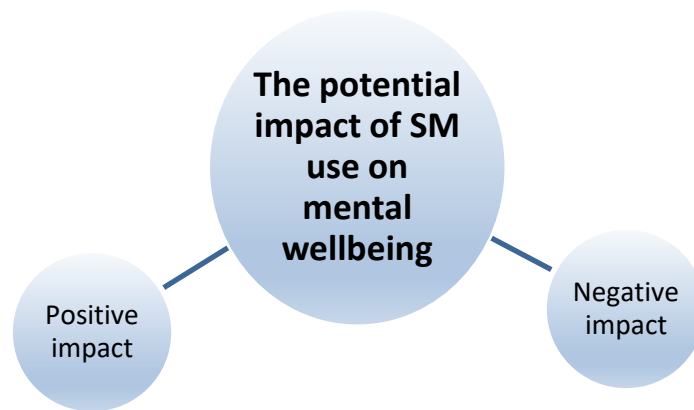


Figure 12: Theme three: The potential impact of SM use on mental wellbeing

The EPs suggested that adolescent girls appear to face new challenges during an already vulnerable period of development as a result of having access to SM. The EPs discussed how SM use may have both a positive and negative impact on girls' mental wellbeing. They referred to how larger societal influences may play a role in the negative implications of SM use on mental wellbeing, in particular with body image concerns.

4.3.3 i **Sub theme: Positive impact**

The EPs discussed ways in which SM may have a positive impact on adolescent girls' mental wellbeing. For example, Aaron described how he thinks SM can be fun to use as 'you're taking a photo, posting it, it's a laugh, something you can do on your own or in a group and that can be fun for them.' Furthermore, the EPs described how girls may feel popular and experience higher self-esteem as a result of receiving positive feedback from their posts on SM;

Kate: And I guess in some cases, if you get positive feedback for that [posting on SM] then that is going to increase your self-esteem, isn't it? So, there is positiveness in some aspects.

Yvonne: It reinforces it.

Aaron: And I guess based on that, I feel some girls will feel they are very popular on SM and that will be reaffirming. And they'll get a lot from that.

As well as posting pictures and receiving feedback, the EPs described how SM may be an effective information gathering and sharing tool to support girls to explore their interests. Kate explained that 'There is a lot of **good** information [...] if you wanted to find out about politics or the environment' on SM. Kate also described how she thinks that young people can get support for mental health difficulties through online communities who have a difficulty or experience in common. Finally, Sophia explained how SM could be used as a platform to discuss mental health and sexuality;

Sophia: I think some young people use it as a bit of a platform for things they are finding difficult don't they? So perhaps mental health. Or even things like coming out, sexuality things like that. They may perhaps use it as a way of communicating that to other people. And I suppose SM means that you just have to do it once rather than having to do that over and over again.

4.3.3 ii **Sub theme: Negative impact**

The EPs described numerous ways in which SM use may have a negative impact upon adolescent girls' mental wellbeing. Sophia explained that she thinks girls may be feeling 'quite a lot of pressure around staying in touch with everybody out of fear that you miss out'. Yvonne provided details of a case which highlighted this;

Yvonne: [...] I worked with a girl who could genuinely not have her phone out of her hand. She was so anxious about what her friends were doing [...] either her friends were somewhere without her and she was missing out [...] and they had excluded her **or** someone said something horrible about her and put something nasty on her page, so she was **constantly** checking her phone.

Aaron suggested there may be a potential increase in peer pressure as 'you can now see it constantly and you'll be comparing yourself...'. Sophia believes the impact of SM 'on mental health and anxiety and self-image is huge'. The EPs highlighted the risks of comparing oneself to other peoples' activity on SM as posts often show the best version of the user and only include the 'rosy bits' of life. Jessica raised her concerns around the comparison culture and its impact upon body image;

Jessica: [...]we know that adolescent girls who use Facebook more frequently have worse body image than girls that don't, but we don't really know why yet, but I think that it is a lot to do with it in terms of that comparison, in particular around looks and because so much of it is photographed based.

The EPs described how some girls can put a lot of thought into their profiles on SM. They explained how it may be important for girls to project an image that was

attractive to others. For example, Abigail described her work with parents: 'The amount of parents you talk to and they say my daughter will put on make-up before she goes to bed so she can take a selfie before going to bed.' Jessica warned of the risks of feedback on photos of adolescent girls. She drew upon wider, societal influences, which may add to these risks;

Jessica: And also that feedback about the way that you look. [...] ... even positive feedback, it reinforces that belief which is absolutely **rife** in society that actually what's important is how you look and [...] that is what you are valued for...

The EPs discussed how using SM appears to have worsened the impact of bullying. Yvonne described how some users may feel more confident behind the screen which could lead to worse behaviours on SM compared to offline as 'people say things on SM that they **wouldn't** say to someone's face to face'. Kate reflected upon the way in which the disadvantages of SM 'seem to *spill out* in a way that doesn't seem to happen (from an outside point anyway) as much as the positive things'. She described how young people have explained that negative experiences on SM can follow them into school and 'impact their wider life rather than just their online life'.

Concerns were raised amongst the EPs around the rate at which information can be shared across SM platforms in the form of tasks or groups. The EPs suggested that these tasks or groups may provide vulnerable young people with an unhelpful sense of belonging such as belonging to a suicide group, an eating disorders group or a self-harm group.

Furthermore, EPs explained how they think that the more extreme risks of SM on mental wellbeing can include death threats, serious cyber bullying and child sexual exploitation. They suggested that SM use could also become an obsession or an addiction for some young people and it may interrupt their sleep. Kate described how 'It [SM] doesn't feel like it is a problem in and of itself and actually it is a problem when there is a vulnerable user.'

4.3.4 **Theme four: EPs have a lot to offer to support young people and their SM use.**

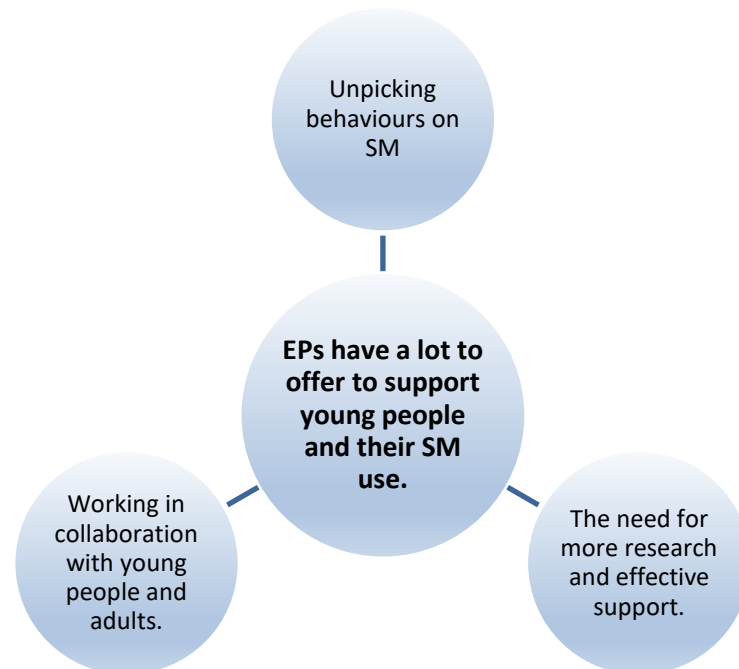


Figure 13: Theme four: EPs have a lot to offer to support young people and their SM use.

The EPs suggested they may become involved with supporting a young person if SM use has become problematic and adults are concerned. For example, if using SM is affecting a young person's behaviour, their mental health, if they are reluctant to come to school because of bullying, if they have become school refusers or if their performance or attendance at school is being affected. At times they were shocked at how young people are using SM as described by other EPs, illuminating the differences in experience of working with young people in relation to SM use amongst the six EPs. They explained that staff in schools need to manage the repercussions of SM use which happens outside of school as it is beginning to impact upon young people whilst they are in school.

The EPs discussed ways in which they can currently support young people and the adults around them when SM use becomes problematic. They explained how their role may differ to other professionals highlighting the unique contribution of the EP to

the topic of SM. They described what may be helpful in the future too, to support young people to effectively use SM.

4.3.4 i **Sub theme: Working in collaboration with young people and adults**

When the EPs described their experiences of working with young people and adults they explained how the adults' understanding and use of SM appeared to differ to the young person's. By bringing generations together, a greater understanding of SM use amongst adolescents may be achieved. Aaron highlighted how the EP can elicit the child's voice and ensure they are heard whilst problem-solving with the key adults around them. EPs described different media through which this could occur; research, talking with parents, young people and school staff.

Kate: [...] it would be really interesting to know what young people would research in terms of SM.

Sophia: [...] it is important for the adults around young people to make it clear that they do understand the benefits as well. Because if they have got the impression that *actually adults don't get it and they just want me to reduce the amount of time I'm spending on SM*, it's not going to be very effective in terms of getting any sort of message through to them.

4.3.4 ii **Sub theme: Unpicking behaviours on SM**

EPs described their role in helping adults and young people try to understand their use of SM. Kate explained how this can reflect the preventative element of the EP role in comparison to CAMHS who may support young people in the later stages of mental health difficulties. The EPs looked beyond the behaviour seen on SM and unpicked what need may be being met through the problematic behaviour in order to make positive change;

Jessica: [...] When people are engaging in behaviour that we see as, is defined as a 'problem', people don't often see the need underneath it. I think that is really the important part of the EP role, actually *what is this behaviour communicating and what need is being met through this behaviour?*

The holistic approach to trying to understand what else is going on in a young person's life in relation to their behaviour on SM appeared to be unique to the EP role. Jessica described, in detail, a case where she looked beyond the behaviour on SM to find a social, communication difficulty;

Jessica: The one time that I became really involved was around a case where a girl was talking to somebody online and was being exploited [...] she was a young lady with Asperger's syndrome and [...] it was hard for her to understand that this person could be lying. [...] it was a wider piece of work because it was about her theory of mind, it was so much bigger than just the SM bit.

Similarly, Yvonne provided an example of why adolescent girls carefully think through their behaviour on SM. She described how adolescent girls may look for a lot of positive feedback within their peer group, in order to affirm their behaviour. Some girls 'may hold onto a picture or something until a particular time because they know more of their friends are on just after 3 when they are out of school or just before they go into school'. They did this to get the optimal number of likes. She goes onto explain why a lot of positive feedback is important for some girls;

Yvonne: It's about the likes [...] it's about getting affirmation from their peers. Especially when you're holding it. It's not only I want you to see what I am doing, I want you to be a part of my world and to kind of journey with me, but I actually need or I am looking for that affirmation from my peer group and I am looking for a **lot of it.**

The EPs drew upon specific psychological theories such as social behaviour mapping, resilience and personal construct psychology to unpick why the girls may behave as they do on SM and which girls may be more vulnerable than others.

4.3.4 iii **Sub theme: The need for more research and effective support**

Although EPs described their previous experiences of supporting young people and adults to help them to understand SM use, there appeared to be an element of uncertainty around the impact of SM use. Jessica suggested whether the concern around SM is 'just another moral panic' and Abigail related it to when the TV first came out and it was described as the 'devil's box'. She asked 'And what's the difference between all of that and SM? It does feel different but is that just because of the age I am at?'

However, they went on to specify which areas need more research in relation to SM use; what young people are doing online in the early hours of the morning and what impact SM may be having on body image. On a more practical level, Yvonne raised her uncertainty as to what constitutes as a healthy or unhealthy use of SM;

Yvonne: That's the new normal [everybody having SM]. But then what are the boundaries around it? What are the helpful ways of using it? What are the safe ways of using it and what is a healthy amount? And why is that a healthy amount?

The ways in which schools can support young people to navigate the costs and benefits of SM were discussed. For example, Kate questioned the effectiveness of schools banning phones given that some girls will wait until they get home to post on their profiles in order to optimise feedback. Yvonne reflected upon how essential effective support is for young people and whether the education young people receive on how to keep themselves safe online is appropriate, reflects the current issues and occurs early enough.

The narrative amongst the EPs around support appeared to be wider than teaching specific skills on how to manage SM. For example, Kate described the importance of supporting positive emotional development to protect vulnerable young people from using SM in an unhealthy way. Furthermore, the EPs discussed the importance of teaching young people about healthy relationships, boundaries, being mindful of their SM use (as it has become so normalised to use it every day) and that they have a choice in how they communicate;

Sophia: I think a lot of the time it is about almost educating around healthy relationships and what that looks like isn't it?

Jessica: I think it is about understanding boundaries, boundaries are really important and I don't think there is enough work done with young people around boundaries and understanding... and helping them to define their own boundaries.
What am I happy with, what I am not happy with?
What is too far for me?

4.4 Summary

The second half of this chapter presented the findings from the data analysis that was undertaken on the focus group with the EPs. It explored the four overarching themes within the data set which were then broken down into further sub-themes. These sub themes were then discussed in detail and quotes from the focus group transcript were used to illustrate the points that were made.

4.5 EP knowledge on SM use amongst young people

This section will bring together the findings from the adolescent girls and the EP focus group and will discuss gaps in EP knowledge, a lack of understanding about what a 'healthy' use of SM looks like and the challenges of talking to EPs about SM. The findings from the EP focus group highlighted the gaps in EP knowledge about SM use amongst adolescent girls. For example, the EPs did not discuss the amount of time that some young people could be on SM for. They also did not mention how SM use can cause conflict within girl friendships. The EPs appeared to be unaware of the subtle uses of SM as reported by the adolescent girls such as comparing comments and likes on photographs. Although the language of 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' use of SM was used amongst the EPs, it remains unclear what a 'healthy' or 'unhealthy' amount of SM use looks like. This study appears to have highlighted areas for further research and exploration.

Although the EPs were able to provide a psychological perspective on SM use amongst young people, at times it was challenging to discuss this topic as it was unclear where they had sourced their knowledge from. There remains a lack of research into the use of SM amongst young people in the UK therefore it is likely that the EPs gained their knowledge and understanding of using SM from sources in the media such as newspapers and websites as well as from their own professional experience. Information from the media may be unreliable. However, their psychological perspective provided a wider, more holistic view of SM use amongst young people which may be helpful when working with young people, families and school staff to understand the possible advantages and disadvantages of using SM.

4.6 Chapter summary

This chapter presented the findings from the data analysis. It explored the six overarching themes from within the interview data and the four overarching themes from within the focus group data. Each theme was broken down further into sub themes and discussed in more detail with quotes from the transcripts which illustrated the points that were made.

I will now consider how these findings relate to the research questions which have been outlined in Chapter three.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

5.1. Introduction

This chapter will discuss and reflect upon the findings, from Chapter four, in relation to the aims of the research, outlined in Chapter one, and the previous literature, as discussed in Chapter two. I will then build upon Chapter three (the methodology) and discuss the strengths and limitations of this research. I will also reflect upon my role as a researcher in this study. I will then suggest potential implications for educational settings and EP practice. This chapter then considers future research that could further contribute to the literature on the use of SM amongst adolescent girls. I will include a reflexive account of the research process towards the end of this chapter.

5.2. Current findings and previous literature

The rationale for conducting this research was to address the gap in the existing literature in the UK on adolescent girls' reported experiences of using SM. All previous research into SM use amongst adolescents in the UK has included a sample of boys and girls. This influenced my decision to conduct a small-scale, qualitative piece of research, which used thematic analysis to explore the reported experiences and perspectives of SM use amongst adolescent girls.

In addition, it was hoped that this research would address the gap in the literature on the knowledge and reported experience of SM use amongst adolescent girls within the EP profession. EPs have a large knowledge and understanding of young peoples' development and apply psychological theory to helping young people and the adults around them to understand an individual's needs and reduce barriers to learning. This influenced my decision to conduct a focus group with EPs to explore EPs understanding of why adolescent girls use SM, the possible impact SM may have on young people and how they, as EPs, may help to support young people to navigate the risks of these platforms.

The first aim of this section is to briefly summarise the results which are relevant to each of the research questions. The second aim is to reflect on how the findings of this study compare to other studies and how this research has contributed to the literature and understanding of SM use amongst adolescent girls and the relevance of this topic to the EP profession. Due to the apparent lack of UK studies that focus specifically on adolescent girls' reported experiences of SM, I will consider the

broader research and theoretical base, which was critically reviewed in Chapter two. I will also draw upon new literature which is relevant to my findings. The interview findings will be addressed first, followed by the focus group findings.

5.2.1 Research question one: What are the reported experiences of SM use by adolescent girls?

5.2.1 i. Summary of themes from this research

The themes that emerged from this research suggest that all the girls reported using SM to chat with their friends, but some girls used it more than others. For example, one girl reported only using it for around ten minutes a day whereas others reported using it for between six and eleven hours. Some described using it more widely and reported carrying out both passive and active behaviours on SM. Using SM was described as being the preferred activity for some girls over other activities such as reading. Some girls explained how SM distracted them from doing their homework. These girls also described using SM during their early teenage years and how their use of SM differs now compared to when they were younger. The proliferation of SM and increased access to technology (such as smart phones) appeared to set them apart from other generations. The girls described growing up with SM and smart phones. As a result, their reported experiences suggest they face new challenges such as a hyper-awareness of feedback and an intensified need to belong as a result of using these new technologies.

5.2.1. ii Usage of SM

Findings from the latest Ofcom report (2017) echo the findings in this study that Snapchat is currently the most popular SM app amongst 15-year olds with streaks being a favourite activity to do on Snapchat (Waldie et al, 2017). SM was used primarily in this study to communicate with friends, a finding which has also been reflected in previous research into young peoples' experiences of SM (Wang & Edwards, 2016; Kaya & Bicen, 2016; Awan & Gauntlett, 2013). It played an essential role in maintaining friendships and appeared to facilitate a sense of belonging between the girls and their peers. However not all the girls used SM for an average of four hours a day as outlined by Ofcom (2017) suggesting some girls may use SM a lot less than others. The ways in which girls use SM reflect the findings by Berriman and Thompson (2015) as their behaviour online reflected a range of high/low visibility

and high/low participation. These findings reflect the importance of understanding individual experiences of SM as this may illuminate why some girls use these platforms more than others and in different ways. This individual experience may also avoid negative stereotypes related to adolescents' use of SM.

For those girls that reported spending at least six hours on SM each day, research suggests time spent online for leisure purposes is associated with less time spent on educational activities and offline leisure activities (Wallsten, 2013). This was supported in the current study as some girls reported spending time on SM at the expense of reading or doing homework, with Mia classing SM as her hobby. However, SM use did not appear to stop the girls from meeting up with their friends therefore these findings did not support the displacement hypothesis outlined by Valkenburg and Peter (2007a) who suggested that time spent communicating online reduces time spent with existing friends. On the other hand, SM use may prevent girls from partaking in more meaningful activities which may have a positive impact upon wellbeing. For example sport has been linked with positive emotional wellbeing (Steptoe & Butler, 1996) but for those girls that used SM the most in this study, they appeared to have no time or little interest in activities other than going on SM.

The changes to the ways in which girls use SM now they are older, echo results in Livingstone's (2008) study. The younger generation appeared to enjoy updating and embellishing their SM profile compared to the older teenagers who preferred a plain profile and expressed their identity through their relationships with others. This was reflected in the current study as some of the girls, especially Abigail, described posting on SM a lot more when she was younger. Abigail and her friends now prefer to use SM just to keep in touch with each other. SM did not appear to be essential in providing her with a sense of belonging. She described no longer caring about the amount of likes she got or followers she had on Instagram as a result of listening to the opinions of bigger SM stars and her friends. This behaviour could be interpreted as being reflexive as she appeared to question *who am I becoming?* as a result of previously posting a lot on SM. Giddens, (1991) suggests reflexivity plays an important role in the identity formation of individuals in our modern-day society. He describes how lifestyle choice and daily activities are becoming more important in the construction of self-identity. However, not all girls described a self-reflexive attitude

towards their SM use as some of them reported using SM for considerably long periods throughout the day. They described having little time to stop, think and reflect on their lifestyle as they appeared to be in continuous contact with others over SM. During a developmental period of considerable change and the importance of identity formation as outlined by Erikson (1968), concerns have been raised that being connected 24/7 may inhibit young people from developing a sense of self as they are experiencing minimal downtime (Conley, 2011).

5.2.1. iii Role of feedback

The interactive nature of SM has enabled users to provide feedback on peoples' posts. In their study with Australian girls aged 14 – 17, Jong and Drummond (2016) discovered how feedback through comments and likes can play a role in the girls' self-esteem and feeling popular. This was also mirrored in research by Ging and O'Higgins Norman (2016). Similar results were reflected in the current study as some of the girls enjoyed getting the likes and the comments (especially on selfies) as it made them feel good about themselves. This finding highlights the importance of image amongst adolescent girls and the way in which their image can be linked with how they feel about themselves. However, they did not appear to emphasise the importance of immediate feedback nor did they use likes as a "trading" tool as outlined in Jong and Drummond's (2017) study. Some of the girls in the current study described becoming disinterested in the likes as they had got older and did not care so much for the feedback any more. Jong and Drummond (2017) also focused on Facebook in their study however likes on Instagram appeared to be more important than likes on Facebook for the girls in this study. This highlights the possible shift that has occurred in the popularity of SM to a more photograph and image-based platform or app.

The girls described how they were more active on SM and boys were more passive as they provided the feedback, such as likes to their photographs. This reflects the findings from Brandes and Levin's study (2014) as boys were described as having "an attitude of looking at girls, while for girls it's really more like a social thing" (p.751). These behaviours on SM could reflect an active male gaze onto a passive female form (Mulvey, 1975). The passive use of SM by boys alongside providing the likes, could be perceived as evidence of a culture in which the male gaze affirms what is deemed attractive in a female. Popular culture has intensified the sexual

objectification of women (Attwood, 2011) and the girls' reported experiences of using SM may reflect larger societal influences on the importance of looking good for the male gaze. Objectification has been linked with feelings of shame and anxiety amongst women as they try to meet society's standards of beauty (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). SM and its increased focus on images may play a negative role in adolescent girls' mental wellbeing because of larger societal expectations of how girls should look and the importance placed on image for women.

As a result of wanting continuous, positive feedback on posts, Summer described editing her pictures (through the use of filters) in order to present a favourable image. This reflects the findings in Doster (2013) as the young people in this study edited their photographs to make them more favourable and regularly updated their profiles to maintain peer interest. It would appear that SM and the feedback it provides can play a role in image management amongst young people.

5.2.1. iv SM and a sense of belonging

SM appeared to play an essential role in providing the girls with a sense of belonging. This finding could reflect the "martini-effect" as suggested by Quinn and Oldmeadow (2013) as some of the girls in this study described using their phones for hours throughout the day to, primarily, stay in touch with friends. Their stories of using SM suggested they enjoyed being able to use their phones and SM, both at school and at home, to keep up with their friends.

The need to stay in touch with friends through SM appears to have increased over the years as research by Awan and Gauntlett (2013), which draws upon data collected in 2009, suggested SM was not essential to friendships for young people aged 14-15 in the UK. Some of the girls in this current study described an intense use of SM to keep up with their peers. This has been termed "fear of missing out addiction" (FOMO) and is reflected in the literature where girls have felt pressure to be online and in touch with their peers (Brandes & Levin, 2014, p.752). SM seems to have intensified the need to belong and as a result, adolescent girls appear to be spending hours a day on these platforms. Researchers suggest that all humans have a need to belong (Maslow, 1943) and this need can be met through establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Adolescent girls

may therefore be seeking a need to belong through their SM use (with their peers) as a result of this need not being met in their local communities or school environment.

5.2.2 Research question two: What are the advantages of using SM as perceived by adolescent girls?

5.2.2 i Summary of themes from this research

The main advantage of SM for the girls in this study was the way in which it connected them with their friends. They described their enjoyment of how it enabled them to establish new relationships and maintain current ones. They also explained that they found SM to be a useful tool to find and share information and it provided them with an insight into how other people (mainly famous people) live their lives.

5.2.2. ii SM and its role and impact upon relationships

All the girls enjoyed talking with their friends on SM. This reflects findings from Wang and Edwards (2016) who found that young people reported using SM to primarily manage their already established relationships. SM use could therefore have a positive impact on adolescent girls' wellbeing as it could increase their social capital as a result of facilitating relationships between young people; a finding outlined by Nolan et al (2017).

The girls invested various amounts of time in maintaining friendships and keeping abreast of what was happening in their social circle on SM (similar to findings of Brandes and Levin, [2014]). Trusting and satisfying relationships during adolescence have been associated with higher self-esteem and feeling less anxious or depressed (Buhrmester, 1990). The use of "connecting behaviours" have been argued to play a role in improving the quality of relationships and meeting the need to belong (Robey, Wubbolding, & Malters, 2017, p.286). SM and its function as a communicative tool, can play a large role in maintaining friendships amongst peers.

In comparison to boys, girls have been found to display increased concerns about the status of a relationship and evaluations from peers due to stronger interpersonal engagement amongst peers (Rose & Rudolph, 2006). Some friendships in the current study appeared less stable than others and if the girls did not reply straight

away to their friends on SM, there was a risk of them being replaced by somebody else. This could reflect a transient nature of friendship and may question the authenticity of the relationship. In early female adolescence, between the ages of 12-15, inauthenticity in friendships has been found to play a role in feelings of depression and low self-esteem (Tolman et al., 2006). Although the girls perceived SM to play a positive role in maintaining their friendships, its role in maintaining strong and authentic friendships appeared, at times, questionable. Young people may not feel a strong sense of belonging, despite using SM every day to maintain established relationships, if they believe they are easily replaced.

The girls in this study saw the value in using SM to breakdown geographical barriers to maintain friendships which was also discussed in Awan and Gauntlett's study in 2013. However, some of the girls also described establishing new friends as a result of using SM. This finding adds to the current research base as previous research suggests young people do not tend to use SM to form new relationships but instead use them to maintain their already established relationships (Awan & Gauntlett, 2013). The increased availability and use of SM may have influenced the likelihood of young people forming new relationships on SM. These relationships may take on a different form if they are established and maintained online. They may also require more effective communication skills as it is not possible for body language to accompany text-based communication over SM. Online friendships may provide young people with a sense of belonging if they perceive these friendships to be authentic, positive and trusting.

At times, the girls described seeing posts from their friends which suggested they were upset or going through a difficult time. Some of the girls appeared more confident to share their feelings through their SM posts. This supports the self-disclosure and stimulation hypothesis outlined by McKenna & Bargh (2000) as the girls felt comfortable sharing their feelings on SM and their friends who saw these posts would message them to check they were OK. This then appeared to strengthen their friendships. However, posting about their feelings on SM made the girls vulnerable to cyber-bullying. For example, the girls described how other users would "screen shot" a post and send it round to other young people. This finding has added to the literature on SM use amongst adolescent girls as it highlights the risks of self-disclosing personal thoughts and feelings on SM. Although the girls perceived it to be

an advantage that they could check in with their friends if they saw them post something worrying on SM, they also made themselves vulnerable to losing ownership over their posts and being made fun of amongst their peers.

5.2.2. iii SM as a helpful tool

Research suggests the smart phone can be used to learn from other people and keep up to date with “culturally relevant events and people” as it can enable users to seek out news and information (Veissière & Stendel, 2018, p.2). Instagram and Facebook were popular amongst the girls in this study and were often used as an information gathering tool to discuss popular shows to watch online; a use of SM that was found to occur amongst a UK sample of 8-15 year olds (Waldie et al, 2017). Furthermore, SM was specifically used as an aid whilst doing homework which has also been reflected in previous survey data (Frith, 2017). Mia explained that SM has helped her to find work experience. This finding appears to add to the current research base as another advantage of SM use amongst adolescents. It would appear the synonymous use of SM and the smart phone has increased the access to information amongst young people and this is being used in a helpful and positive way.

The girls in this study also described enjoying the ways in which SM enabled them to know what other people do in their lives, especially famous people. They also explained that they liked how SM allowed them to post about their own lives and receive feedback from other users. This finding reflected the hyper-natural monitoring hypothesis outlined by Veissière and Stendel (2018) who suggested that by using smart phones and SM, individuals are able to stay connected with others and are also able to observe and monitor others. The girls in this study described using their smart phones and SM to observe and monitor others as well as be seen and monitored themselves.

5.2.3 Research question three: What are the disadvantages of using SM as perceived by adolescent girls?

5.2.3 i Summary of themes from this research

The girls in this study described several disadvantages of using SM. These disadvantages were a result of how the girls reported interacting with SM as well as their descriptions of how other users can make SM an unpleasant place to be. For

example, they described how SM often played a part in causing friendship difficulties. They were also aware of the unavoidable comparative behaviours they partook in because of passive scrolling on SM. At times they described finding SM addictive and explained how they enjoyed taking a break from the constant messaging between friends.

The girls further highlighted many disadvantages of SM which related to how other people use the sites and apps. For example, they described how anybody can get SM (this was particularly risky for younger children), there is nobody policing SM to ensure people are behaving appropriately and people can behave differently behind the screen (resulting in more confidence and nasty behaviours).

5.2.3.ii SM and conflict

The amount of conflict that the girls in this study described witnessing and experiencing has been observed in other research into adolescent girls' reported experiences of SM (Ging & O'Higgins Norman, 2016). In particular, being excluded from the group, spreading rumours and falling out due to mis-communication. Research suggests that adolescent girls can experience feelings of stress and shame when they feel rejected or experience a threat of rejection (Flacking, Jerdén, Bergström, & Starrin, 2014). It could be argued that frequent friendship difficulties, as a result of using SM, may have a negative impact upon adolescent girls' wellbeing.

SM enables users to carry out unkind behaviours without the fear of confrontation. Similar to the findings of Ging and O'Higgins Norman (2016) the girls downplayed their experiences of friendship difficulties and did not elude to them as cyber bullying. However, at times their experiences reflected the definition of cyber bullying as outlined by O'Moore (2014):

Aggressive, wilful behaviour that is directed by an individual or group against another individual or group with the help of technological devices, primarily mobile/smartphones and the internet. (p.17).

Although friendship difficulties were often the result of mis-communication, at other times the girls described experiencing wilful behaviour from others to exclude, embarrass or upset them. These behaviours could be perceived as a form of

relational aggression; relational aggression relates to behaviours which harm individuals as a result of threatening to or actually damaging a relationship, feelings of being accepted or belonging to a group (Jackson, Cassidy, & Brown, 2009). This mirrors the literature which suggests girls partake in relational aggression in order to preserve a feminine gender identity (Crothers, Field, & Kolbert, 2005). The current study adds to the research on how reported behaviour of using SM from adolescent girls may reflect society's expectations on how "traditional girls" manage their friendships. Due to the frequency at which the girls experienced conflict amongst their peers, it could be argued that these traditional ways of navigating friendships are not an effective way to maintain strong, trusting relationships.

5.2.3. iii SM and comparative behaviours

Festinger (1954) suggests that individuals evaluate themselves by comparing themselves with others in their peer group in order to achieve self-improvement. However, by engaging in social comparison behaviours, individuals may experience pressure to continue to better themselves (Meier & Gray, 2014). The ways in which adolescent girls compare likes, comments and their body image against their peers on SM has been found in other studies into girls' reported experiences of SM (Burnette et al, 2017; Chua & Chang, 2016). Some of the girls reported finding it difficult to avoid partaking in comparative behaviours whilst using SM; a finding which was also reflected in a study by Chua and Chang (2016).

Amy who spent the longest on SM (up to eleven hours) explained that she had absorbed the "need to be perfect" as a result of passive activity on SM. This supports findings by Tiggemann and Slater (2013) and Meier and Gray (2014) who suggest the amount of time spent online and on photo activity on Facebook is associated with weight dissatisfaction, body surveillance and a drive to be thin. The relationship between SM use and body image concerns appear to be linked with comparing oneself to others and partaking in passive activity on SM (such as looking at others' photographs). The girls in this study referred to Instagram more than Facebook, adding to the literature on the potential impact that photo-based SM apps may have on body image concerns amongst adolescent girls.

Veissière and Stendel (2018) suggest comparative behaviours may be a by-product of using a smart phone to connect with others as "the desire to socially connect is an

even stronger motivator of smartphone use than the desire to do better than others” (p.7). This adds to the literature on the possible negative, yet subtle, consequences that may arise as a result of using SM to establish a sense of belonging amongst adolescent girls.

5.2.3. iv SM can be addictive

Research into Internet use suggests the use of SM can increase the risk of being addicted to the Internet (Kuss, Griffiths, & Binder, 2013). The addictive nature of SM was discussed amongst some of the girls in this study as their need to be in touch with friends and keep up with what was happening in their social circles appeared to be the motivator to spend prolonged amounts of time on SM. This was also reflected in Brandes and Levin’s (2014) study. Some of the girls appeared more vulnerable to the addictive nature of SM as they felt a strong need to belong and SM played a large role in their identity.

5.2.3. v Lack of boundaries

All the girls explained that their profiles were set to private however this did not stop personal information being shared without their consent with other SM users. Findings from Livingstone (2008) suggested adolescents think carefully about what personal information they reveal to whom on SM in order to exert control over who knows what about them. Since the introduction of smart phones, the ability for young people to screenshot posts on SM appears to have violated this sense of agency as the girls described posting about their feelings which were then screen-shotted and sent around to other young people. Having one’s profile set to private no longer seems enough to manage who sees what information about you.

The girls described how it can be risky for younger children to have SM as they do not understand the importance of boundaries and may partake in risky behaviours online. A couple of the girls described using SM too much when they were younger due to a lack of boundaries and Chloe went onto describe how children below the age of 13 should not have SM as it ‘ruins your childhood’. These were worrying comments given that children as young as five seem to have a SM profile (Waldie et al, 2017). Boundaries appear to play a key role in keeping children and young people safe on SM.

5.2.3. vi *Communicating behind a screen*

Findings from this study suggest people can behave differently behind a screen. These echo findings by Ofcom (2017) which suggests 67% of young people aged 12-15 think most people behave differently online compared to face to face interactions. Suler's (2004) theory the *Online Disinhibition Effect* was described by the girls as they explained how people feel more confident online to say nasty things due to the increased anonymity, the lack of authority figures online and the lack of emotional response that one may experience during a face to face interaction. With the increase in communication over SM amongst young people, more education is needed on the impact of being nasty over SM and young people need to know who they can talk to and trust if and when they experience nasty behaviours.

5.2.4 Research question four: How do adolescent girls manage the disadvantages of SM?

5.2.4 i *Summary of themes from this research*

The girls described several ways in which they managed the disadvantages of SM; having their account set to private, ignoring and deleting posts which upset them and blocking other users who made SM a negative place to be for them. They described speaking to trusted adults when they felt sad after spending time on SM. They also described how they managed conflict in their friendships which had resulted from SM. These strategies appeared to act as protective factors against feeling low as a result of using SM. They also helped to prevent SM from having a negative impact upon their friendships.

5.2.4 ii *Changing behaviour to manage disadvantages of SM*

The girls in this study were constantly balancing opportunities and risks presented to them by SM; behaviour which was also reflected in Livingstone's study (2008). For example, the girls reported enjoying the opportunities of SM such as socialising and using it to present their identity alongside managing the risks such as keeping their profile private and managing conflict which arose through mis-communication.

The ways in which the girls ignored or got rid of unwanted posts on SM was in keeping with Ging and O'Higgins Norman (2016) who found that adolescent girls explained that they ignored abusive behaviour and de-friended, blocked or closed their account in order to put an end to the negativity they experienced online.

It is unclear how effective the aforementioned strategies were at managing the disadvantages of SM as despite ignoring, blocking and deleting their account, at times SM got too much for them and they described how they often welcomed a break from it.

5.2.4 iii Talking about feelings

Those girls that were feeling low as a result of using SM or had experienced a negative event on SM, described feeling safe to discuss their thoughts and feelings with a trusted adult. Mia had good mental health literacy as she explained that some of her friends were not talking about their feelings and as a result, were self-harming. Having good mental health literacy has been linked with help seeking behaviours amongst young people (Burns & Rapee, 2006). This highlights the need for mental health education for young people, in particular, the role that SM may have on mental wellbeing. This may then help young people to recognise when to seek help to manage uncomfortable thoughts and feelings as a result of using SM. However, despite having good mental health literacy, Amy had described how she had absorbed the need to be perfect as a result of social comparison behaviours on SM. In comparison to Burnette et al (2017) none of the girls mentioned how their school environment promoted confidence in relation to body image or media literacy. Burnette et al (2017) suggest the school culture can contribute to reducing the impact of adolescent girls comparing themselves to others on SM as well as fostering a culture where young people accept their appearance. The findings from this study suggest there is a gap in the support for adolescent girls to manage the adverse effects of SM at a systemic, whole school level, particularly in relation to SM use and body image concerns.

5.2.4 iv Repairing friendships

The girls explained that they repaired their friendships (after having fallen out due to using SM) in different ways. This finding emphasises the importance of the girls' individual experiences on SM. Some of the girls reported managing conflict in their friendships via indirect methods such as posting about friendship difficulties on SM or they sought to avoid conflict altogether and left group chats. Although not directly linked to SM use, this finding reflects a study by Crothers et al (2005). These researchers suggested that adolescent girls partake in indirect methods of conflict management as it enables them to exert control over their relationships whilst

meeting expectations of traditional femininity. The findings from this research contribute to the literature on SM use amongst adolescent girls as their perceived experiences suggest a wider, societal expectation may be influencing how they manage conflict within their friendships over SM.

These findings also add to the ways in which adolescent girls can make themselves vulnerable to cyber bullying. For example, posting about a friendship difficulty can provide a space for other users to comment and share that post. Some girls may not feel confident to confront their friends if they are experiencing friendship difficulties but the indirect way of posting about conflict on SM provides a space for others to become involved and form a judgement on a situation. This also reflects the lack of boundaries that adolescents are experiencing on SM as they are able to post anything at any time in a private space which is removed from adults.

5.3. Summary of findings

The findings from this study suggest the use of SM is an individual experience. However, the need to belong and fit in with a peer group was reflected throughout all the interviews. All the girls reported experiencing something negative on SM and at times their descriptions suggested that these experiences had become normalised. Although SM appeared to maintain and establish relationships between young people and their friends, the girls' reported experiences suggest it also caused conflict and has led to an increased culture of comparison, impression management and has facilitated nasty behaviours.

5.3.1 What does this study tell us alongside or over and above mixed-gender studies?

This study has added an understanding of SM use over and above mixed-gender studies as it has highlighted subtle ways in which adolescent girls use SM. For example, it has suggested how SM can play a role in friendship difficulties amongst girls and for some girls, it has intensified a need to belong. This finding was not reflected in mixed-gender studies by Livingstone (2008), Awan and Gauntlett (2013) and Wang and Edwards (2016). In addition, it has highlighted how girls sometimes share their feelings or thoughts on SM which signals to their friends that they may be going through a difficult time. Although this can make them vulnerable to cyber

bullying (by peers screen shotting and sending the message onto others), it can also encourage a friend to get in touch and check they are OK. Friendships play an important part during adolescence, especially amongst girls, therefore this is an interesting finding in relation to how SM use may have a negative or positive impact on mental wellbeing.

In addition, SM use appeared to play an important role in impression management for some of the girls in this study. Both passive and active use of SM reflected an element of impression management as some girls would think carefully about what to post (in order to appeal to others) as well as compare likes and comments whilst passively using SM to learn what was and was not popular amongst their peers. This was reflected in the study by Doster (2013) who suggested SM can play a role in producing the 'aesthetic self' amongst young people (boys and girls) aged 14 to 16 years old. It is unclear in both this research and Doster's (2013) study whether girls or boys invest 'more' in the production of an "aesthetic self". The results from this study highlight the nuanced ways in which SM use can be a part of impression management for adolescent girls.

The following section will outline the findings from the focus group data.

5.4 Introduction to focus group findings

The first aim of this section is to briefly summarise the results which are relevant to each of the research questions. The second aim is to examine the findings in the context of any related literature. I will reflect on how the findings of this study have contributed to the literature and understanding of adolescent girls' uses of SM amongst the EP profession. Due to the lack of research into the EP voice on SM use amongst adolescent girls, I will draw upon a wider research base which was critically reviewed in Chapter two.

5.4.1 Research question one: Why may adolescent girls behave as they do on SM?

5.4.1 i Summary of themes from this research

The EPs explained how the changes that occur during adolescence can provide a possible explanation as to why adolescent girls use SM the way they do. These included both neurological and psycho-social changes.

5.5.1 ii Adolescence as a unique period of development

Ernst et al (2006) suggest that during adolescence, behaviour may occur due to stronger activity in the reward-related area of the brain which over rides the weaker harm-avoidant area of the brain whilst the regulatory system is unable to balance and regulate these two areas. The findings from this study reflect this neurological model of adolescence, as the EPs suggested neurological changes may explain why adolescents display risk-taking and potentially harmful behaviours of SM. If the reward-related area of the brain overrides the harm-avoidant area of the brain, then we may observe risky behaviours on SM. For example, young people may post risky photographs of themselves as these may attract positive attention through the form of likes and comments. Although these risky photographs may make them vulnerable to cyber bullying or being exploited by others, the reward of feeling popular and accepted amongst their peer group may override the decision to be safe online.

The EPs also discussed the psycho-social changes that occur during adolescence as a possible reason for their behaviours on SM. This reflects the current literature on SM use amongst adolescents as research suggests young people appear to use SM as a way to connect with others (possibly providing them with a sense of belonging) and to explore their identity (Brandes & Levin, 2014; Doster 2013; Livingstone, 2008).

5.4.2. Research question two: What may be the potential impact of SM use on adolescent girls?

5.4.2 i Summary of themes from this research

The EPs described how the proliferation of SM use amongst adolescent girls has divided them from older generations. In addition, the EPs discussed how SM use may have both a positive and negative impact on adolescent girls' mental wellbeing. They referred to how larger societal influences may play a role in the negative implications of SM use on mental wellbeing, in particular relation to body image concerns.

5.4.2 ii Generational divide

The reasons why SM may divide generations has been reflected upon by Turner (2015). For example, Turner (2015) suggests the introduction of technology such as tablets and smart phones has led to a generation which has grown up with access to the internet and in a world which is heavily connected. This sets them apart from other generations who have experienced a time without the Internet and without technologies such as smart phones and tablets. The findings from the EP focus group have added to the literature on this topic, by providing detail on how the generations may be divided as a result of using SM. For example, due to a large amount of communication now taking place online amongst young people, the EPs described how some friendships are established and maintained online. This may divide the generations as the older generation may not perceive such a friendship as "real" as they may expect a friendship to involve meeting up face to face. The shift from face to face communication to online communication may influence how an individual perceives friendship.

The EPs also discussed the impact of a generational divide when trying to support young people. This finding adds to the literature on SM use amongst adolescent girls as the EPs explained that sometimes it is not the SM use which is problematic but the differences in perception of SM use between young people and the key adults around them. It may be more helpful for the older generation to work in collaboration with young people to try and understand how they are making sense of their world and what their experiences online look like to them. This may encourage young

people to feel more understood and may enable more effective communication between young people and adults.

5.4.2 iii Positive impact on mental wellbeing

The findings from this study reflect the findings in the literature which suggests how SM use may have a positive impact on mental wellbeing. For example, SM can help to establish and maintain friendships which may provide young people with a sense of belonging (Wang & Edwards, 2016; Allen et al., 2014). SM can help to develop one's identity as well as provide access to a range of information (Doster 2013; Schurigin O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011). These parallels between the findings from this study and those in the literature adds to the research on the EP role and the knowledge this profession can bring to the topic of SM.

5.4.2. iv Negative impact on mental wellbeing

Similarly to the section above, the findings from this study reflect those found in other pieces of research which suggest SM use may have a negative impact on the mental wellbeing of its users. For example, the EPs described feelings of 'fear of missing out' (similar to Brandes & Levin, 2014), the impact of SM use on mental health and anxiety (Cramer & Inkster, 2017; Frost & Rickwood, 2017), the increase in comparative behaviours due to social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) and the ways in which cyber bullying may be worse than face to face bullying due to the *Online Disinhibition Effect* (Suler, 2004).

In relation to adolescent girls, the findings from this study reflect the literature on the possible impact SM use may have on body image concerns as outlined by Tiggemann and Slater (2013) and Meier and Gray (2014). The EPs discussed larger societal influences which may add to body image concerns such as feeling valued in this society for the way you look. These findings add to the research base as they offer a philosophical perspective on the possible negative impact SM use may have on the mental wellbeing of adolescent girls. Cultural expectations appear to play a role in how SM use may impact upon adolescent girls. This suggests a wider perspective may be helpful in understanding the possible negative impact SM use may be having on the mental wellbeing of young people.

Furthermore, the findings from this study have added to the literature as they described how the disadvantages can impact upon young peoples' lives in a larger

way compared to the ways in which the advantages impact upon young peoples' lives. This suggests the disadvantages may outweigh the advantages of SM use. However, SM use continues to be popular amongst young people therefore they may be at risk of experiencing more serious negative implications of using SM compared to the advantages. This highlights the need for ongoing research and support into the disadvantages of SM and how best to help young people manage the risks.

EPs appeared to be aware of the advantages and disadvantages of SM on mental wellbeing, suggesting as a profession, they have the skills and knowledge to help support young people with their SM use.

5.4.3. Research question three: how can the EP profession support young people, families and school staff to safely navigate SM?

5.4.3 i Summary of themes from this research

The EPs discussed the importance of bringing generations together to better understand young peoples' behaviour on SM through problem solving conversations. They explained the need to look beyond the behaviour that is seen and to unpick why young people may be behaving as they are on these platforms. They outlined the importance of teaching young people about healthy relationships, positive emotional development, boundaries, being mindful of their SM use (as it has become so normalised to use it every day) and that they have a choice in how they communicate with their peers. The EPs also identified a gap in the research as it remains unclear what constitutes a healthy or unhealthy use of SM and generations could also come together as a result of participatory research (these findings will be discussed in sections 6.0).

5.4.3 ii Consultation and SM

The use of consultation may be relevant to the topic of SM use amongst young people. A consultation aims to reach an improved understanding of a young person's strengths and difficulties, resulting in a set of agreed actions which leads to positive change and better outcomes (Nolan & Moreland, 2014). The EPs outlined that they would often become involved if SM use was causing problems for a young person. The problem-solving model may provide an effective framework to help EPs undertake effective psychological analysis of a situation (Kelly, 2006).

The EPs in this study highlighted the importance of looking underneath problematic use of SM to explore what needs may be being met. By interpreting behaviour as communication, an EP can hypothesise why a young person may be using SM in a problematic way. The Multi-Element Model (Lavigna & Willis, 2005) could be applied during a consultation meeting when supporting a young person's problematic use of SM. This model draws upon changes to the environment, positive skill development for the individual, targeted support strategies and reactive strategies to reduce challenging behaviour. Changes to the environment could include the opportunity to partake in a regular hobby to help reduce the amount of time a young person may be spending on SM. Positive skill development could include teaching a young person mindfulness techniques to encourage them to be aware of why they are using SM and targeted support strategies could include an incentive for the young person if they reduce their SM use. The last element of this model includes reactive strategies. A reactive strategy could be to restrict SM use for the young person. The reasons for problematic SM use are likely to be complex therefore a multi-element approach could provide a comprehensive way in which a young person can be effectively supported.

Another way in which an EP could help to support a young person's problematic use of SM during a consultation meeting could be through re-framing the adults' perspectives of the young person's behaviour. The way in which behaviour is perceived by an individual can influence the choice of tool to gather more information, the formulation of a hypothesis, the choice of intervention and how change is evaluated (Ayers, Clarke, & Murray, 2001). For example, a biological perspective of problematic use of SM may lead key adults to perceive hormones as the cause of a young person's behaviour and drugs may be prescribed to affect change. A different perspective, such as an ecological perspective may encourage key adults to reflect upon the role the environment may be playing on a young person's behaviour. As a result of this perspective, the environment could be adapted to increase a sense of belonging which may reduce a young person's need to access SM in problematic ways.

However, a consultation is likely to only focus on an individual's use of SM therefore may have a limited impact on the wider needs of young people in an educational setting. The EPs discussed the importance of developing interventions which support

vulnerable young people. The following section will discuss group interventions to develop positive emotional wellbeing which may lead to a healthy use of SM and support uncomfortable feelings which may arise as a result of using SM.

5.4.3 iii Group interventions to developing emotional wellbeing

Sophia suggested SM use has had an impact upon feelings of anxiety amongst young people. This reflects the literature as reported SM use, in particular night-time specific use, has been found to be associated with increased levels of anxiety amongst young people aged 11-17 in Scotland (Woods & Scott, 2016). An evidence-based programme such as the FRIENDS for Life intervention (Higgins & O'Sullivan, 2015) may help to support young people who are experiencing anxiety. This intervention aims to support children, young people and their parents to learn effective skills and strategies to handle anxiety (Higgins & O'Sullivan, 2015). An EP could help to deliver this intervention or train and supervise those in an educational setting to deliver it to young people. Although a larger piece of work may be required to encourage young people to use SM in a more balanced way, strategies to help manage feelings of worry which may result from using SM could form part of the picture to supporting young people and their SM use.

The EPs also suggested the need to support positive emotional development, healthy relationships and boundaries in order to protect vulnerable young people from using SM in an unhealthy way. Frydenberg et al (2004) suggest the health and well-being of young people is related to the growth of psychosocial skills. These skills can include positive thinking skills and the understanding and implementation of effective coping strategies with a decrease in the dependence on ineffective coping strategies (Frydenberg et al., 2004). Their study into the BOC Programme suggests it is possible to teach young people effective coping skills which can reduce ineffective coping strategies such as worrying, self-blame and seeking to belong. The researchers suggest this programme had the biggest impact when the psychologist was involved in the running of the programme and the training of the staff, suggesting an EP is well placed to deliver an intervention of this nature. Young people may use SM in a healthier way if they have been taught effective coping strategies to manage the stressors of adolescence.

Another way in which a school setting could develop emotional wellbeing could be via a culture which fosters a sense of belonging. Glasser (2001) suggests individuals choose how they want to behave in order to get their needs met. Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943) suggests an individual may need to feel a sense of belonging before they experience self-esteem and obtain a high evaluation of themselves. Feeling connected as a result of social relationships is fundamental throughout adolescence (Allen et al, 2014). The ways in which individuals meet their need to belong can be less clearly defined compared to other needs, such as thirst (Glasser, 2001). SM may provide young people with one such way of meeting their need to belong as it is used to maintain friendships. In addition, feedback on posts can determine what is acceptable behaviour amongst a peer group. Young people may therefore choose to access SM for long periods throughout the day in order to feel a sense of belonging. However, excessive use of SM may not have a positive impact on mental wellbeing therefore if young people can experience a sense of belonging within their school, they may not feel the need to be on SM for several hours a day. In addition, research suggests students who feel more accepted within their school environment are more engaged with their learning (Osterman, 2000). An EP could work at an organisational level to support a setting to provide a sense of belonging for its students.

The ways in which EPs can help to support key adults and young people themselves to partake in a healthy use of SM adds a psychological perspective to the literature on SM use. This study has highlighted several ways in which the EP profession can help to promote a healthy use of SM; through unpicking SM use which is causing a concern, providing evidence-based interventions to support positive mental wellbeing and helping to foster a sense of belonging within a school community.

5.5 Summary of findings

The findings from this study suggest EPs can provide a useful psychological insight into adolescent girls' uses of SM. They have drawn upon a range of models and theories to suggest ways in which they can help to support young people (both boys and girls) with their use of SM. Their reported experiences provide examples of the ways in which young people are experiencing difficulties with SM. This highlights the need for ongoing research and support to help young people enjoy the advantages of SM and minimise the risks.

5.6 A critique of the research

An evidence-based tool guide which can be used to evaluate research may help to provide a robust and thorough evaluation of a study (Guthrie, Wamae, Diepeveen, Wooding, & Grant, 2013). I have therefore decided to use the criteria from the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP, 2017) to evaluate the quality of this research.

5.6.1 Strengths and limitations

This study set out clear aims in Chapter one, which were developed and refined after a thorough review of the most relevant literature. Having carried out this review, a gap in the current literature was discovered. Few studies exist in the UK into the reported use of SM, especially with girls aged 14-15, therefore this study captured a gender specific and age specific reported experience of SM. I planned to elicit and analyse the reported experiences and perspectives of SM use from eight adolescent girls. There is also a gap in the literature on the EP voice which can provide a psychological perspective on SM use amongst adolescent girls. I therefore planned to elicit and analyse the reported experiences and perspectives of six EPs in relation to adolescent girls' uses of SM. As a result of my aims, I believe that a qualitative methodology was the most appropriate approach to take.

Upon reflection, I believe that the research design was appropriate to address the aims of the research. The use of thematic analysis enabled me to explore a range of reported experiences and perspectives on SM amongst two populations; adolescent girls and EPs. The findings from the sample of adolescent girls may have been different if behavioural methods, such as observation had been used. However, even if the findings had been different, it is important to understand the perceptions of young people on their SM use in order to explore how they are making sense of their online worlds.

With regards to the recruitment strategy that I employed, eight girls aged 14-15 were chosen at random to take part and 14 EPs were invited to take part in a focus group which required six of them to consent to be involved. A report by Ofcom (2017) suggests that 74% of young people aged of 12-15 who go online have a profile on SM. It was therefore hoped that 14-15-year olds would all have used and still be using SM. It was also hoped that they would be able to reflect upon their experiences and offer their perspectives on SM. In addition, it was hoped that six EPs could

provide a psychological perspective on SM use amongst adolescent girls and offer suggestions on how the EP profession can help to support young people with their SM use.

Most of this study's findings are supported by key studies into adolescent girls' reported experiences of SM in the literature (Brandes & Levin, 2014; Ging & O'Higgins Norman, 2016; Jong & Drummond 2016). This study did not aim to provide results which can be applied to a wider population but instead it aimed to share the girls' descriptive stories of using SM. Therefore, a sample of eight girls provided a detailed and contextual picture of how SM is perceived to be used amongst adolescent girls. Similarly, the views of EPs were intended to illuminate the psychological mechanisms which may influence SM use and how SM use may impact upon a user's mental wellbeing. In addition, the EP voice was elicited to explore how the EP role can help to support families, young people and school staff to encourage a healthy and balanced use of SM.

I believe that the use of semi-structured interviews facilitated personal perspectives and reported experiences which provided an insight into the meaning of SM use amongst adolescent girls. The interviews enabled the subtleties of SM use to be discussed; these may have been lost if the sample were asked to fill out a questionnaire. Similarly, the use of a focus group enabled me to explore the perspective of adolescent girls' usage of SM amongst EPs.

It is important to acknowledge that I, as the interviewer, affected the data in that I was responsible for asking questions and prompting the sample for additional responses to my questions. Due to my interest in the topic and how widely I had read around the subject before the interviews, I wanted to cover several areas of SM. This, at times, made the girls' descriptions of SM quite "thin" as details were not always followed up on the point that they originally made. A focus on one area of SM, such as friendships or identity may have helped to provide more depth to this research. However, given the exploratory nature of this study, I was unsure what topics may have been focused upon during the interviews given the wide scope of research that has been previously carried out on the topic of SM. The qualitative, flexible approach to the research enabled me to explore the full spectrum of reported SM use amongst adolescent girls. In addition, I brought my own experience of using SM as well as a

psychological perspective to the interviews, therefore I asked additional questions to follow up important points made by the girls. At times this provided a richer description of their experiences on aspects of SM use which I felt were important and may have an impact upon their mental wellbeing.

The ways in which I considered ethical issues throughout this research process have been outlined in Chapter three.

Throughout the data analysis process, I chose to follow guidelines outlined by Braun and Clarke (2013). These guidelines provided me with a clear structure which enabled me to produce a detailed and thorough analysis of my data that drew out key ideas from the interview and the focus group data. In order to limit subjectivity during the analysis stage, my supervisor coded an extract from one of the transcripts. We then met to discuss my codes and themes. This supervision session also helped me with my interpretative analysis and enabled me to go “beyond the obvious” (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p.210) whilst analysing the data. In order to enhance the credibility of the findings, I could have met with each participant again to reflect upon the themes that I derived from the transcripts. However, due to the restriction on my time, this was not possible and instead I met with my supervisor, as outlined above, to limit the subjectivity during the data analysis stage.

The findings of this study have been discussed in detail in Chapter 4, followed by a detailed discussion on how the findings relate to each research question in Chapter 5.

The next sections will outline recommendations for EP practice which have been made as a result of the findings from this study. This could be considered a strength of the study as it is hoped that the findings will have a practical and useful purpose to supporting young people with their use of SM. Further areas of research will also be discussed for others to add to the research base on young peoples’ uses of SM.

5.7 Professional implications

As a trainee EP, I believed that it was important to carry out a piece of research that could potentially inform professional practice. The current study offers implications for understanding more about how and why adolescent girls use SM and the possible positive and negative implications on mental wellbeing. In particular, the ways in

which young people may be meeting their need to belong through their use of SM. In addition, it offers implications for how and why an EP may be well placed to support adolescent girls to manage the benefits and costs of SM.

EPs work at different levels within their professional practice (Curran, Gersch, & Wolfendale, 2003). I will outline the ways in which this research could have implications for practice within the individual, organisation and systemic levels.

5.7.1 Individual

EPs explained how they may get involved with an individual young person if their SM use has become problematic and is causing concern for the adults supporting the individual. The results from this study suggest that girls partake in a balancing act to enjoy the advantages of SM alongside managing the risks. An EP could help an individual to restore the balance of their use of SM by encouraging them to participate in other activities alongside using SM which promote positive mental health and wellbeing.

An EP could also explore how a young person is making sense of their world with tools which apply personal construct psychology (Ravenette, 2002). By exploring what is important to a young person and understanding how they are behaving in order to get their needs met, an EP may be able to hypothesise why SM is playing a negative role in their life. The EP could then work with the key adults around the young person, and with the young person themselves, to enable them to get their needs met in ways which have a positive impact on their mental wellbeing.

5.7.2 Organisation

The girls in this study described how often they fell out with their friends as a result of using SM. An EP could work at a group level with adolescent girls to explore their concept of friendships and how to effectively manage conflict. Resources could be shared with school staff and parents on how to support adolescent girls with their friendships if they are regularly experiencing difficulties. Adults who support young people could also role model effective conflict resolution. This may prevent adolescent girls from partaking in passive ways to manage conflict such as posting friendship difficulties on SM or leaving group chats to avoid confrontation. A culture within the school, home and community which encourages freedom of expression may also prevent adolescent girls from using SM in an ineffective way to

communicate how they feel when experiencing friendship difficulties. This may reduce the negative impact SM is having on girl friendships and it may empower girls to manage conflict in a more effective way.

An EP could also work with groups of staff and parents to explain the balancing act that adolescent girls are working on to enjoy the advantages and minimise the disadvantages of using SM. This could be through training or during a consultation. By keeping communication channels open between trusted adults and young people, any worries or concerns regarding SM can be shared. Positive role models who use SM in a healthy, balanced way could help young people to regularly employ effective strategies to minimise the risks of SM.

Rainie and Anderson (2018) argue the need for digital media literacy programmes to be available for young people. They suggest more education is needed for young people to understand the risks of SM platforms. An EP could work with researchers to help design and implement a digital media literacy programme to empower young people to make informed decisions as to how and why they choose to engage with SM. It is becoming apparent that technology and SM are a part of everyday life therefore an increase in education into how to effectively navigate these tools may help to reduce the risk of them having a negative effect on the mental wellbeing of its users.

5.7.3 Systemic

This research could feed into the Green paper titled *Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision* (Greening & Hunt, 2017) as the findings suggest the nuanced ways in which SM may have a negative and positive impact upon adolescent girls' wellbeing. The girls' stories have provided detail on how subtle the impact of SM use may be upon their wellbeing. This research could be fed into the Green paper through an edition of the journal *Educational Psychology in Practice* which could have a specific focus on SM use amongst adolescents. This could enable other trainee EPs, who have also carried out their research into SM use amongst young people, to publish their work and contribute their findings to the Green paper.

A working party of EPs who have carried out research into SM use amongst adolescents and who are interested in the topic could be put together to share good

practice and ideas on how to support families, young people and school staff to partake in a balanced use of SM. This working party could then put together a conference for local schools to share their psychological insight into adolescents' reported use of SM and ways in which schools can support their students to use the platforms in a balanced and positive way.

This study has provided a starting point into research on adolescent girls' reported experiences and perspectives of SM. I have also illuminated how this topic is relevant to the EP role. Research into the area of adolescent girls' uses of SM is still in its infancy. I will now discuss areas for future research which can build upon the findings from this current study and previous research in the UK.

5.8 Future research

It was outside the scope of this research to build upon current studies into SM use and sleep which have been carried out in the UK by Power et al (2017) and Woods et al (2016). A diary method of data collection could expand on the use of SM before bed and during the night amongst adolescent girls. At the end of six months, this sample could then be interviewed to explore their SM use in a more contextual way. This may provide an insight into what other factors may influence SM use amongst adolescent girls. By exploring why some young people use it more than others, those who may be more vulnerable to the disadvantages of using SM could receive additional support to help minimise any negative impact on their mental wellbeing from using these platforms.

Further research which adopts a longitudinal design could explore the long-term impact of spending several hours a day on SM at the expense of engaging in other activities. Using SM to this extent is not yet fully understood. A longitudinal study may help to illuminate the possible advantages and disadvantages SM use may have on users' mental wellbeing when used for several hours a day. In addition, a longitudinal study may highlight what constitutes as a healthy and unhealthy use of SM.

This study suggests adolescent girls can experience frequent friendship difficulties as a result of using SM. More research which builds upon the findings by Betts et al (2017) could help to explore the relationship between friendship difficulties and perceptions of learning. Peers play an important role amongst adolescent girls

therefore the impact of frequent friendship difficulties (as a result of using SM) on attitudes to learning requires further research.

As SM develops, further research into the EP role and its relevance to SM use may help to build upon the findings in this study. In particular, creative and innovative ways, which draw upon psychological theory and models to help young people to navigate the advantages and disadvantages of SM could be developed.

In order to support adolescent girls to use SM in a healthy way, the efficacy in the ways in which they manage the disadvantages is not yet known. More research into the strategies outlined in this study may help to explore effective ways in which adolescent girls can enjoy the advantages and minimise the risks of SM.

The EP role includes carrying out research as part of its core functions (Currie, 2002). The EPs discussed how research *with* young people may help to bring generations together. This collaborative research could help to elicit the voice of young people and encourage them to reflect upon their SM use. As a result of being a part of the research process they may feel a sense of agency over what decisions could be made as a result of the research (for example, ways in which they could ensure they have more positive experiences on SM compared to the negative experiences).

There is a need for research to keep up with the fast-changing pace at which SM and technology is developing. This is likely to be an ongoing challenge as research takes time to carry out and be published.

5.9 Chapter summary and conclusions

This chapter has outlined how the findings from this study have answered each research question. The findings have been discussed in light of the current literature on SM use and how this study has added to, diverged from or reflects the current research base. A discussion has also been provided on what this research tells us over and above mixed-gender studies. A critique of the research has also been provided and ideas for future research have been presented.

I will now provide a reflexive account of the research process.

6.0 A reflexive account

In this section, I will reflect upon my experience of undertaking this piece of research. I will discuss how the research process has helped me to develop skills and knowledge, both as a researcher and as an EP.

6.1 Reflections on the research process

Upon reflection, I believe my beliefs, values and previous experiences of using SM influenced my study in three different ways. Firstly, I believe SM has become a part of everyday life for a lot of people, particularly young people. It is therefore important that we understand the experiences of SM use amongst young people in order to support them to use it in a way which is not detrimental to their mental wellbeing. Secondly, I value the voice of young people and believe it is important to elicit their voices on topics which directly affect them. This influenced my decision to use interviews to gather my data. I also value the psychological perspective that EPs can bring to a topic therefore decided to carry out the focus group. Thirdly, my previous experience of using SM and reflecting upon when it made me feel low encouraged me to explore whether adolescent girls are having similar experiences and if so, how are they managing these feelings?

Having reflected upon the focus group with the EPs, it is unclear what the inclusion criteria 'interest in SM' might have meant to each participant. This inclusion criteria could have been made more specific by stating 'an interest in SM use amongst young people'. It was also difficult to explore topics of SM use which EPs were not aware of. For example, they did not mention how SM use can cause friendship difficulties, highlighting that they do not know what they don't know. However, this has highlighted a gap in EP knowledge therefore the results from the interview data could be used to help increase EP knowledge of SM use amongst young people.

I will now discuss the research process in more detail.

The first stage of the research process I would like to reflect upon was the interview method that I used to elicit the girls' voices. At several points throughout the eight interviews, some girls found it hard to reflect upon an experience that they were still having. SM has become so normalised for them that some of them found it difficult to step out and reflect upon the role SM plays in their lives. This encouraged me to reflect on the tools I use as an EP to elicit the voice of children. I regularly draw upon

personal construct psychology and solution focused thinking in my work with children. I have wondered whether a more interactive and visual method of data collection may have led to richer data and a more detailed insight into the reported experiences of using SM amongst adolescent girls. However, due to the lack of research on adolescent girls' reported experiences of using SM within the UK, this study can be a gateway to further research into this evolving and important topic.

Another stage of the research process that I would like to reflect upon was the data analysis and write up of the findings. The findings chapter took a lot longer than expected and a considerable amount of drafts in order for it to fit into the word count. I felt that it was very important to tell the story of each of the eight participants given how much they had shared with me during the interviews. It was a challenge to make the findings concise whilst also making sure that I gave equal details of the girls' reported experiences. I can remember my supervisor describing how I appeared to want to stay faithful to the data. My initial drafts reflected an emotional investment that I had developed over time with the data and the girls. Although initially I felt very challenged by the amount of data I had accrued from eight participants, I was eventually able to develop common themes. I asked friends and family to read over the final draft of my findings chapter to ensure it provided a coherent narrative.

I thoroughly enjoyed meeting with the girls and the EPs whilst collecting the data. I was surprised at how honest and open the girls were with me given that SM played an important role in their personal lives. All the girls described one or more negative experiences as a result of using SM and they described these with great detail and honesty. I was also surprised and encouraged by how enthusiastic and engaged the EPs were during the focus group. Their experiences, knowledge and psychological insight into adolescent girls' experiences of SM and its relevance to the EP role has made me realise how important and relevant this topic is to the EP profession.

As well as the positive experiences during this research process, there were also challenges along the way. I did not anticipate how long it would take for me to write and re-write each chapter. This process has encouraged me to reflect upon the skills of writing and it has taught me to be patient with the process.

By breaking the research down into achievable steps with set goals and deadlines, I was able to complete the doctoral dissertation.

6.2 How has writing a doctoral dissertation affected me personally? What have I learned from the experience?

On a personal level, this doctoral dissertation has encouraged me to reflect upon my own use of SM and its implications on my own mental wellbeing and that of my peers. I have felt empowered to think more critically towards this technology which has become normalised and accepted as something that everybody has, and everybody uses in modern day society.

I have also reflected upon how I have used SM to meet my own need to belong. From the age of 21, I have found it difficult to obtain a sense of belonging as I have moved around every year, gaining experience in different settings in order to start my training as an EP. I have therefore used SM to keep in touch with old friends and keep abreast of what friends and family are doing. This research into SM use has encouraged me to invest in meeting my own need to belong by joining a local cycling club, spending time with colleagues outside of work and committing to staying in Bristol after my doctoral training. It is hoped that this will reduce the need for SM to provide me with a sense of belonging.

As a result of carrying out doctoral level research, I have learnt how to ask for help and what self-care strategies are effective in helping me manage stress. I have learnt to manage uncomfortable feelings which arise from being in a constant state of chaos and uncertainty. I have found it difficult, at times, to accept the messy nature of real world research. This was amplified by the deadlines I had to meet and the lack of having more than two to three days together to immerse myself in the research. I found that by breaking the process down and focusing upon one chapter at a time, I was able to make progress one step at a time.

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Appendix

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Appendix A. Systematic literature search

The table below outlines the inclusion and exclusion criteria which was applied to the systematic literature search:

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Peer reviewed published paper	Not yet published
Published in or before 2008	Published before 2008
Written in English	Written in a language other than English
Sample aged 11-18	Sample aged outside 11-18 age range
UK based sample including boys and girls.	Non- UK based sample including boys and girls
Non- UK based sample including girls only.	Duplicates deleted

Table 6 Inclusion / Exclusion criteria for literature search

I carried out a systematic literature search on 20.07.17, 10.10.17 and 02.03.18.

For each database outlined below, I carried out a search with the following terms:

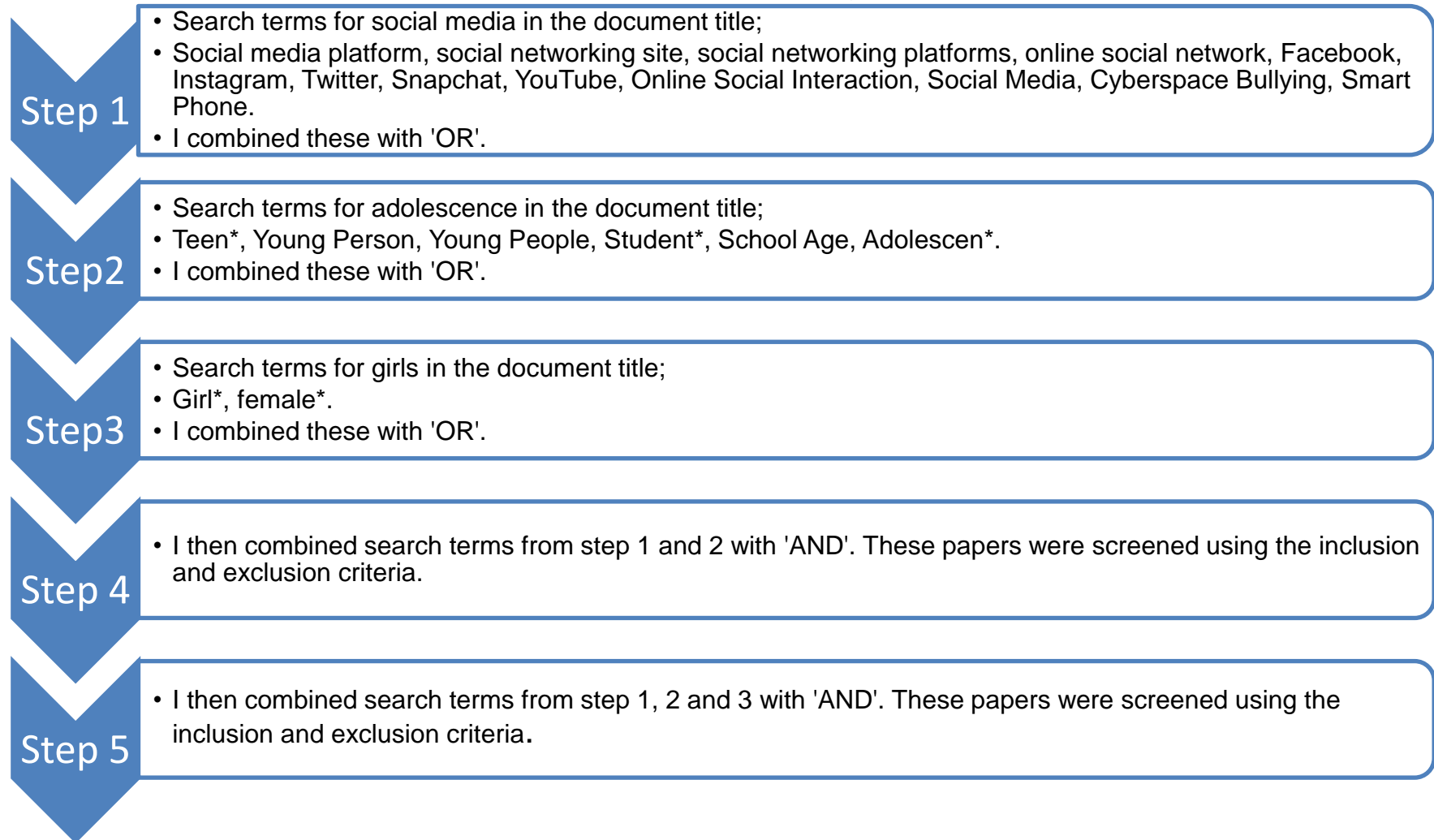


Figure 14: Flow chart for systematic literature search

The table below outlines the results from the systematic literature search:

Database	Step 1 results	Step 2 results	Step 3 results	Step 4 results	Step 5 results	Papers screened	Relevant papers based on inclusion and exclusion criteria
International Bibliography of Social Sciences (IBSS) including ERIC, Australian Education Index and Sociological Abstracts.	6215	100,746	146,800	588	21	588	8
Psych Info	10125	265916	46887	1647	45	45	6
British Education Index	471	15027	15687	71	0	71	2
							16 total papers

Table 7: Literature Search Results

Appendix B. EP focus group topic guide.

What is your understanding of why adolescent girls use social media?

What could be the potential advantages of adolescent girls using social media?

What could be the potential disadvantages of adolescent girls using social media?

Which psychological theories and models could be applied to help us understand certain behaviours on social media?

When might an EP become involved in work which relates to adolescent girls use of social media?

How could an EP help to support appropriate use of social media by adolescent girls?

Why is the EP role important within the context of social media use by adolescent girls?

Appendix C. Changes made to the topic guide for the interviews

Topic Guide for the pilot interview.	Changes made to the topic guide	Final topic guide for the sample.
<p><u>Range of social media sites, accessibility and duration of use.</u> Which social media sites do you access the most and for how long? Daily habit of usage?</p> <p>Favourite? Why?</p> <p>How do you access them?</p> <p>How often (hours per average day)?</p> <p><u>Specific activity on social media sites</u> What do you do on social media? (Passive / Active behaviour)</p> <p>Do you have friends on Facebook you haven't met before?</p> <p>How do you decide what to post and when and to whom? How do you manage others' posts about you which you may not want?</p> <p>Do you think your social media activity reflects your identity offline?</p> <p>Do you have any privacy settings set on</p>	<p>I combined the questions what they use, how they use them and for how long into one question followed by their favourite one.</p> <p>I added why and why not to prompt me to encourage the girls to provide detail on their answers.</p>	<p><u>Range of social media sites, accessibility and duration of use.</u> Which social media sites do you access the most and for how long? Daily usage? How do you access them?</p> <p>Favourite? Why? Why else?</p> <p><u>Specific activity on social media sites</u> What do you do on social media? (Passive / Active behaviour) Why? Why not?</p> <p>Do you have friends on Facebook you haven't met before?</p> <p>How do you decide what to post and when and to whom? How do you manage others' posts about you which you may not want?</p> <p>Do you think your social media activity reflects your identity offline? How? Why?</p> <p>Do you have any privacy settings set on</p>

<p>your social media accounts?</p> <p>How often do you spend time alone, not connected to a social media site?</p> <p><u>Feelings towards experiences</u> Do you ever feel sad after spending time on social media?</p> <p>Do you ever feel happy after spending time on social media? Why?</p> <p>Does your mood ever change after spending time on social media? Why do you think that is? How do you manage this?</p> <p>Do you compare yourself to others?</p> <p>Do you ever feel pressured to respond to friends online straight away? Keep up with peers?</p> <p>Do you ever feel like you are missing out when you see others' posts on social media?</p>	<p>I added for how long and why to gather more detail.</p> <p>I took this question out as it was too leading.</p> <p>I added questions to encourage more detail on the answers.</p>	<p>your social media accounts? Why?</p> <p>How often do you spend time alone, not connected to a social media site? Why?</p> <p><u>Feelings towards experiences</u> Do you ever feel sad after spending time on social media? How long if so and why or why not?</p> <p>Do you ever feel happy after spending time on social media? How long if so and why or why not?</p> <p>Does your mood ever change after spending time on social media? Why do you think that is? How do you manage this?</p> <p>Do you ever feel pressured to respond to friends online straight away? Keep up with peers?</p> <p>Do you ever feel like you are missing out when you see others' posts on social media? Why? How does this make you feel?</p>
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	<p>I added this in after discussing it with my supervisor.</p>	<p>How would you define social media to somebody who has never heard of it?</p>
	<p>I added this to get more detail from their descriptions / definitions of social media.</p>	<p>Can you think of anything special about social media, which you feel really only exists on / by using social media? What does this look like?</p>
	<p>I added in these questions to maintain rapport and close the interview.</p>	<p><u>Closing the interview</u> What are your aspirations for the future?</p> <p>Is there something that you think would be helpful for me to know, that I might not have asked? Are there any questions that you were expecting?</p> <p>Are you happy with everything that we have discussed? Do you have any questions for me?</p>

Appendix D. Example of coding, interview data, participant two.

Data	Codes	Additional codes from my supervisor
<p>Transcription Participant two 04.12.17 Researcher Which social media sites do you access the most and for how long? P.2 Probably Instagram and Snapchat and I go on them for at least six hours a day. Researcher Do you? (both laugh) OK. Do you access them at school? P.2 Err yeh. So I go on them at break and lunch and then when I get home I go straight onto them. Researcher What are you doing on them? P.2 Hmm, contacting friends, looking at what things they are posting, what's going on with them. And I even use them to find out what to do with homework and stuff like that. Researcher OK, how do you do that? P.2 So I mostly use Snapchat for messaging friends and I'll just like send... I'll do my streaks first which is like messaging them for every day so we get a number of streaks and</p>	<p>Not sure how long on SM, on SM a lot.</p> <p>On SM in free time, on SM at school, on SM at home.</p> <p>SM as a communication tool, passive activity, friends / everyone are on SM, SM as an information tool.</p> <p>SM as a communication tool, SM and streaks, measuring how often girls message on SM.</p>	<p>Spending a lot of time on SM over other activities.</p>

<p>most of my streaks are like 300 days.</p> <p>Researcher</p> <p>So what is a streak? Can you tell me a bit more about that?</p> <p>P.2</p> <p>Hmm it is where you message every day continuously, messaging at least once a day each of your friends and once you get up to three days it starts a number next to their name. So everyone gets a number.</p> <p>Researcher</p> <p>Ah ok, so how often you've messaged them?</p> <p>P.2</p> <p>Yeh. So yeh, I'll mostly go on my top streaks which is all my best friends and then I'll swipe onto their name which I'll just start messaging them straight away.</p> <p>Researcher</p> <p>What sort of time in the morning do you first go on social media?</p> <p>P.2</p> <p>Probably as soon as I get up. So I turn my alarm off and then sit in bed for a bit and go on social media and swipe through Instagram and stuff.</p> <p>Researcher</p> <p>Yeh? What sort of people do you follow on Instagram?</p> <p>P.2</p> <p>Hmm, quite a lot of celebrities, like singers and actors, stuff like that.</p> <p>Researcher</p> <p>Yeh? Do you have a favourite person on Instagram?</p>	<p>SM and streaks, measuring how often girls message on SM.</p> <p>SM and streaks, measuring how often girls message on SM, friends on SM. SM as a communication tool.</p> <p>SM and morning routine, passive activity.</p> <p>Following famous people on SM, passive activity.</p>	
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<p>P.2 Hmm, I am quite fond of Tom Holland and Selena Gomez.</p> <p>Researcher Ah OK. Why do you access social media for that long each day?</p> <p>P.2 Hmm, because, you could class it as my hobby, because it's so easy to use and it's quite nice just knowing everything that is going on.</p> <p>Researcher Yeh</p> <p>P.2 So just a quick swipe through is just quite interesting.</p> <p>Researcher Yeh. How do you feel when you are swiping through?</p> <p>P.2 Some stuff is quite, you could say it's quite threatening. Like, it definitely lays out what we're expected to be like but then again its social media so you have just got to push it aside and ignore it.</p> <p>Researcher Do you find that you are able to do that when you see images?</p> <p>P.2 Yeh, I seem to be but other people aren't. Like, there is a lot of, I get some of my friends coming up to me and 'Oh I have just seen a model and it is saying the perfect body size – is that seriously what we are supposed to look like?' It definitely like,</p>	<p>Following famous people on SM, passive activity.</p> <p>Ease of use, SM as a research / information gathering tool, SM as a hobby, keeping up with peers.</p> <p>Passive activity.</p> <p>Negative experiences on SM, SM depicts ideal image for adolescents, Girls have learnt to ignore negative posts on SM.</p> <p>Girls have learnt to ignore negative posts on SM, Friends on SM, Girls partake in comparative behaviours when passive on SM, SM</p>	
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<p>puts out an image that they are expecting teenage girls to look like.</p> <p>Researcher How does that make you feel?</p> <p>P.2 It is quite threatening and you cant say it is a nice thing but, its those people – they are proud of themselves so yeh, they are going to post it on social media but you just kind of learn to ignore it.</p> <p>Researcher Yeh. Have you always... so how have you learnt to ignore it?</p> <p>P.2 Hmm, just swipe past and try not be phased by anything. Don't linger on that post. Try and just make sure you don't sit there and stare and like make sure ... I don't know how to explain it... its like just try and not be phased by it and just think 'oh yeh, my body type is mine and I've just got to stay that way'.</p> <p>Researcher Do you think there's an element of something that comes from you in your ability to do that?</p> <p>P.2 Yeh, you could say so. I don't really know (laughs).</p>	<p>depicts ideal body image.</p> <p>Negative experience on SM, Showing off on SM, Girls have learnt to ignore negative posts on SM.</p> <p>Girls have learnt to ignore negative posts on SM.</p> <p>Intrinsic resilience</p>	
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Appendix E. Example of coding, focus group

Data	Codes	Additional codes from my supervisor
<p>Researcher</p> <p>What is your understanding of why adolescent girls use social media?</p> <p>Y: I think the first one you think of, is that what their peer group, what their peers are doing? Their friends use social media, that is how they keep in touch, that's what adolescent girls that I work with – that is what they do. It's kind of become normalised, so they kind of join in with their peers.</p> <p>K: So there's that social aspect of it.</p> <p>D: They want to feel part of a group don't they? It's how they communicate these days.</p> <p>O: It's keeping up with your peer group and knowing what's going on with everybody else as well. And I think there is quite a lot of pressure around staying in touch with everybody out of fear that you miss out.</p>	<p>Young girls and their peers use SM, SM is a tool to socialise with.</p> <p>SM is a tool to socialise with, all adolescents use SM.</p> <p>SM is a tool to socialise with.</p> <p>Adolescence and the need to belong, SM is a communicative tool.</p> <p>Adolescence and the need to belong, SM may lead to feelings of missing out.</p>	<p>SM is normal behaviour amongst adolescents.</p>

<p>Y: Yeh, definitely. But it's also projecting what you're doing and showing other people what you are doing as well, 'this is what my life is like...', I get to show...</p> <p>F: The rosy bits?</p> <p>Y: Yeh yeh get to show the rosy bits and show people what is going on with me.</p> <p>D: Do you think if they don't have social media they might be picked on for that?</p> <p>O: I suppose they'll look different.</p> <p>Y: They might feel left ... it may not necessarily mean they are being picked on...</p> <p>F: But not included.</p> <p>Y: Yeh</p> <p>O: Do you think it also gives them a sense of identity - having a social media account as well? It's sort of a way of exploring and communicating who you are and what's important to you.</p> <p>K: You're the best version of who you are.</p> <p>O: Absolutely, you are the best version.</p> <p>K: You don't have to show all the horrible bits.</p> <p>O: Your ideal self</p>	<p>SM posts can reflect the best bits of life and the best bits of you.</p> <p>SM posts can reflect the best bits of life and the best bits of you.</p> <p>Everybody has SM</p> <p>Everybody has SM, need to belong.</p> <p>Everybody has SM</p> <p>Everybody has SM</p> <p>SM is now part of identity formation in adolescents.</p> <p>SM posts can reflect the best bits of life and the best bits of you.</p> <p>SM posts can reflect the best bits of life and the best bits of you.</p>	
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<p>K: Yeh absolutely.</p> <p>L: Do you think some girls are also going on social media to make friends? I don't know, I'm not sure, I am aware that lots of young people that I work with have told me that, you know, 'oh I am friends with so and so' and I will say 'oh how do you know him or her' and they'll say 'oh we met on Facebook or Instagram or met on YouTube' and it is... I think a lot of young people have friends on Social Media which they haven't actually met in real life.</p> <p>Y: Yeh</p>	<p>SM posts can reflect the best bits of life and the best bits of you.</p> <p>Girls make friends on SM as SM can bring people together.</p> <p>Girls make friends on SM as SM can bring people together, girls may find it easier to communicate through a screen.</p>	
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Appendix F. Information sheet for parents and carers

What are the experiences of social media amongst adolescent girls?

Dear

Your daughter has been randomly selected to participate in a piece of research on the experience of social media. I am a researcher from the University of Bristol and this research is part of my Doctorate qualification to become an Educational Psychologist.

I am planning on carrying out interviews with six to eight teenage girls in Year 10. The interviews will be recorded, transcribed, anonymised and analysed for themes related to the role social media can play in adolescent life. The initial findings and ideas from all participants will be summarised for the school. Anonymised quotes may be used in the write up of this study.

Your daughter will be adding to the research base on social media by participating in this study. Social media has become an inevitable part of life for the younger generation and we do not yet understand the advantages and disadvantages of sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat. There is a gap in the research into the experiences of social media amongst adolescents, especially research into the child's voice. This study will help the adults supporting young people to understand their experiences of social media and the advantages and disadvantages of using it. This understanding can then help to support adolescents' appropriate use of social media.

I would be grateful if your daughter could participate in an interview with me, during the Autumn term 2017. The interview will last for approximately 45 - 60 minutes. I will be asking your child some questions about how and why they use social media. All answers will be treated with the strictest of confidentiality unless harm to a child or a vulnerable adult is discussed and then this would need to be reported.

The interview will be recorded, then transcribed and all names will be anonymised. Every effort will be made to ensure no names are linked to comments. Data from this research study will be stored for 20 years at the University of Bristol. It will be stored anonymously and made available for other researchers to use until 2038. Your daughter is under no obligation to participate and may withdraw at any time during the interview. She will be able to withdraw her data from the study up to seven days after the interview. I will contact the school pastoral lead, head of year or SENCo to organise a suitable date and time to interview, when you have returned the consent form attached.

Please check that you are happy with the consent form and its contents, sign it and return it to CZButler@somerset.gov.uk. If anything is unclear, please contact me and I will be happy to provide further details.

Thank you in advance for your help. Please let me know if you should require any further information.

Yours sincerely,
Caroline Butler

Appendix G. Consent form for parents and carers

Please initial each box, fill in the blanks with your daughter's name and sign in the space provided at the bottom of the page.

- I give my consent for to be interviewed by Caroline Butler to explore her experience of social media. ☐
- I understand that the interviews will take place at school, during the Autumn term, 2017. ☐
- I understand that will be recorded and that the recording will be transcribed, anonymised and analysed by Caroline Butler. I have read and understand the information sheet included with this consent form. ☐
- I understand that all answers will be treated with the strictest of confidentiality unless harm to a child or a vulnerable adult is discussed and then this would need to be reported. ☐
- I understand that the findings will be shared with the school, Somerset Local Authority and the University of Bristol. ☐
- I understand that at any time before or during the research will be able to withdraw from the research. ☐
- I give consent for my daughter's data to be saved anonymously and used by other researchers. ☐

Signature: _____

Print Name: _____

Phone number: _____

Email address: _____

Please circle your preferred method of communication: phone / email.

Appendix H. Information Sheet for participants

What are the experiences of social media amongst adolescent girls?

Dear

You have been randomly selected to participate in a piece of research on the experience of social media. I am a researcher from the University of Bristol and I am interested in finding out how and why young people use social media.

I am planning on carrying out interviews with six to eight teenage girls in Year 10. The interviews will be recorded, transcribed, anonymised and analysed for themes related to the role social media can play in adolescent life. Anonymised quotes may be used in the write up of this study.

If you decide to take part, you will be contributing to the research base by participating in this study. Social media has become a big part of life for your generation and we do not yet understand the advantages and disadvantages of sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat. This study will help the adults supporting young people to understand your experiences of social media and the advantages and disadvantages of using it. This understanding can then help to support adolescents' appropriate use of social media.

I would be grateful if you could participate in an interview with me, during the Autumn term 2017. The interview will last for approximately 45 - 60 minutes. I will be asking you some questions about how and why you use social media. All answers will be treated with the strictest of confidentiality unless harm to a child or a vulnerable adult is discussed and then this would need to be reported.

The interview will be recorded, then transcribed and all names will be anonymised. Every effort will be made to ensure no names are linked to comments. Data from this research study will be stored for 20 years at the University of Bristol. It will be stored anonymously and made available for other researchers to use until 2038. You are under no obligation to participate and may withdraw at any time during the interview. You will be able to withdraw your data up to seven days after the interview. I will contact the school pastoral lead or SENCo to organise a suitable date and time to interview you when you have returned the consent form attached.

Please check that you are happy with the consent form and its contents, sign it and return it to CZButler@somerset.gov.uk. If anything is unclear, please contact me and I will be happy to provide further details.

Thank you in advance for your help.

Please let me know if you should require any further information,

Caroline Butler

Appendix I. Consent form for participants

Please initial each box and sign in the space provided at the bottom of the page.

- I give my consent to be interviewed by Caroline Butler to explore my experience of social media. ☐
- I understand that the interviews will take place atschool, during the Autumn term, 2017. ☐
- I understand that I will be recorded and that the recording will be transcribed, anonymised and analysed by Caroline Butler. I have read and understand the information sheet included with this consent form. ☐
- I understand that all answers will be treated with the strictest of confidentiality unless harm to a child or a vulnerable adult is discussed and then this would need to be reported. ☐
- I understand that the findings will be shared with the school, Somerset Local Authority and the University of Bristol. ☐
- I understand that at any time before or during the research I will be able to withdraw from the research. ☐
- I give consent for my data to be saved anonymously and used by other researchers. ☐

Signature: _____

Print Name: _____

Appendix J. Information Sheet for pastoral lead / SENCo / head of year

What are the experiences of social media amongst adolescent girls?

Dear

Thank you for expressing an interest in your students' participating in a piece of research on the experience of social media. I am a researcher from the University of Bristol and this research is part of my Doctorate qualification to become an Educational Psychologist.

I am planning on carrying out interviews with six to eight teenage girls in Year 10. The interviews will be recorded, transcribed, anonymised and analysed for themes related to the role social media can play in adolescent life. The initial findings and ideas from all participants will be summarised for your school. Anonymised quotes may be used in the write up of this study.

Your students will be contributing to the research base by participating in this study. Social media has become an inevitable part of life for the younger generation and we do not yet understand the advantages and disadvantages of sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat. There is a gap in the research into the experiences of social media amongst adolescents, especially research into the child's voice. This study will help the adults supporting young people to understand their experiences of social media and the advantages and disadvantages of using it. This understanding can then help to support adolescents' appropriate use of social media.

I would be grateful if 6 of your students could participate in an interview with me, during the Autumn term 2017. The interview will last for approximately 45 - 60 minutes. I will be asking them some questions about how and why they use social media. All answers will be treated with the strictest of confidentiality unless harm to a child or a vulnerable adult is discussed and then this would need to be reported.

The interview will be recorded, then transcribed and all names will be anonymised. Every effort will be made to ensure no names are linked to comments. Data from this research study will be stored for 20 years at the University of Bristol. It will be stored anonymously and made available for other researchers to use until 2038. Your students are under no obligation to participate and may withdraw from the interview at any time. They will be able to withdraw their data up to seven days after the interview.

If you would like to be a part of this study, please email me on the address CZButler@somerset.gov.uk.

I will then arrange a suitable date and time to come in and randomly select participants with you and provide you with the relevant consent and information sheets.

If anything is unclear, please contact me and I will be happy to provide further details.

Thank you in advance for your help. Yours sincerely, Caroline Butler

Appendix K. Information Sheet for Educational Psychologists**What is your understanding of adolescent girls' experiences of social media?**

Dear

Thank you for expressing an interest in participating in a piece of research on your understanding of the experience of social media amongst adolescent girls. I am a researcher from the University of Bristol and this research is part of my Doctorate qualification to become an Educational Psychologist.

I am planning on carrying out a focus group with 6 – 8 EPs to explore the understanding of adolescent girls' experiences of social media within the EP profession. The focus group will be recorded, transcribed, anonymised and analysed for themes. The findings will be presented to the EP service. Anonymised quotes may be used in the write up of this study.

You will be contributing to the research base by participating in this study. Social media has become an inevitable part of life for the younger generation and we do not yet understand the advantages and disadvantages of sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat. There is a gap in the research into the EP's understanding of adolescent girls' experiences of social media. This study will help the EP profession to understand how the EP role can help to support adolescents' appropriate use of social media.

I would be grateful if you could participate in a focus group with me during the Autumn term 2017. The focus group will last for approximately 45 - 60 minutes. I will be asking you some questions about the EP role in relation to social media. All answers will be treated with the strictest of confidentiality unless harm to a child or a vulnerable adult is discussed and then this would need to be reported.

The focus group will be recorded, then transcribed and all names will be anonymised. Every effort will be made to ensure no names are linked to comments. Data from this research study will be stored for 20 years at the University of Bristol. It will be stored anonymously and made available for other researchers to use until 2038. You are under no obligation to participate and may withdraw at any time during the focus group. You will be able to withdraw your data from the study up to seven days after the focus group.

If you would like to be a part of this study, please email me on the address CZButler@somerset.gov.uk.

If anything is unclear, please contact me and I will be happy to provide further details.

Thank you in advance for your help.

Yours sincerely,
Caroline Butler

Appendix L. Consent form for Educational Psychologists

Please initial each box and sign in the space provided at the bottom of the page.

- I give my consent to take part in a focus group with Caroline Butler to explore my understanding of adolescent girls' experiences of social media. ☐
- I understand that the focus group will take place at, during the Autumn term, 2017. ☐
- I understand that I will be recorded and that the recording will be transcribed, anonymised and analysed by Caroline Butler. I have read and understand the information sheet included with this consent form. ☐
- I understand that all answers will be treated with the strictest of confidentiality unless harm to a child or a vulnerable adult is discussed and then this would need to be reported. ☐
- I understand that the findings will be shared with the school, Somerset Local Authority and the University of Bristol. ☐
- I understand that at any time before or during the research I will be able to withdraw from the research. ☐
- I give consent for my data to be saved anonymously and used by other researchers ☐

Signature: _____

Print Name: _____

